$3

November 16, 2025

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

The Friends of the South Haven Library meet four times a year to discuss library programs and activities that support the library.

Turn the page

Local group helps South Haven library grow and thrive

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — In South Haven, a small group of book lovers has turned their passion for books and libraries into a mission – helping the local library thrive through fundraising and advocacy.

The Friends of the South Haven Memorial Library is a nonprofit group of volunteers who support the library.

"We're a separate entity from the library," Friends President Paul Buchbinder said.

Buchbinder said the Friends mission is to raise public awareness about the library and to raise money to support the programs there.

"We basically support the library and the library policies and try to raise awareness of the library programs that benefit the South Haven library," he said.

The main fundraiser the Friends help organize is the annual book sale.

"The fundraiser that we have is the book sale," Buchbinder said. "People donate books and in July – actually we had two this year – we have a book sale. It runs for a couple of days."

All the money that is raised during the book sale goes directly to the library.

"We like to do it during the summer months because we have so many visitors to South Haven," he said. "The library is right next door to the farmers market and its (on) Saturdays, (which) that's a bonus for people to come in."

Buchbinder said he got involved with the group after he moved to South Haven in 2020 from Chicago.

"I actually was part of the Friends of the Oak Park Library and so, we had an annual book fair," Buchbinder said. "It's quite different compared to South Haven. Book sales are great because people have summer reading and year-round reading. There are also children's books, which are very popular, so we're really glad to get those into the hands of kids."

The Friends meet regularly four times a year to discuss past library activities, budgeting and plans for future programs and activities at the library.

During the last meeting for this year, the Friends welcomed a new member, John Marcotte. He recently retired from the University of Michigan and is now an emeritus archivist at the university.

"People ask me what I was going to do in retirement and I said 'I'd like to get involved with the library,' because I love libraries," Marcotte said.

Many of the board members said they joined due to their love of books and libraries.

Buchbinder opted to join the Friends of the South Haven Library to help promote literacy.

"I sort of had this thing for libraries and books. (It) could be a key part of my name. B-u-c-h is German for 'book,'" Buchbinder said.

Aside from the book sale, the Friends support other library programs, including the summer reading program.

"Just because you're out of school doesn't mean you can't keep feeding your mind," Buchbinder said.

He said the library's programs are a good example of how the Friends and the library have impacted the community.

"I think the success of the programs that we support is sort of a testament to that," Buchbinder said. "It brings families together."

With how many places are banning books now, Buchbinder said it's important to give people the opportunity and freedom to choose what they want to read.

"Whether the friends are contributors to that or not, if we support the library, we support literacy and the right to read what you want to read (and) learn what you want to learn," Buchbinder said.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

Van Buren ISD speaks out over state budget cuts

By TRIBUNE STAFF

LAWRENCE — The new state budget may look like a win for education, but for the Van Buren Intermediate School District, it is expected to bring a major funding challenge.

According to a news release from the Van Buren ISD, when all the changes are added up, the district is facing a net loss of more than $845,000 for the coming year.

That loss means new funding in areas like special education and career and technical education will be wiped out by cuts and cost shifts in other important programs.

"As a result, the Van Buren Intermediate School District is concerned that this shortfall could affect the essential services and support provided to local school districts and more than 15,000 students across Van Buren County," the release stated.

The largest hit comes from changes to how school employee retirement costs are funded. The state eliminated nearly $2 million that previously helped the district cover these mandatory expenses.

While there was a small adjustment to lower the overall cap, the change still leaves the district paying about $650,000 more each year out of its regular operating budget, money that otherwise would go directly to classrooms and student support.

The Early Childhood Block Grant, which provided $342,000 for preschool programs that help children get ready for kindergarten, has been eliminated. Funding for adult education was also reduced by $68,000, making it harder for adults in the community to finish their high school education or build new career skills.

"The Van Buren Intermediate School District appreciates the modest increases in some areas of the budget, but those gains don't come close to covering what's been lost," the release stated.

District officials said they are now reviewing the budget to limit the impact on students and staff as much as possible.

"Our top priority will always be doing what's best for kids," Van Buren Intermediate School District Superintendent Dave Manson said in the release. "These changes make it harder to provide the same level of support our local schools and families count on. We're going to keep looking for ways to make sure our students continue to receive the services they deserve."

South Haven Twp. adopts 2026 budget

SHAES to expand its fire shifts with increased staffing

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Township trustees adopted the 2026 budget after holding a public hearing Wednesday.

Township Clerk Brenda Bertorelli gave a brief overview of the budget and some recent updates that were made.

Bertorelli said one of the updates was to the marijuana tax. She said the township lost a dispensary so she estimated the numbers would change from $175,000 in 2025 to $150,000 in 2026, due to the loss.

Another change to the budget was to the general government expenses to make a donation of $2,500 to the domestic violence coalition after their funding was cut.

Expanded fire shifts

South Haven Area Emergency Services Executive Director and Chief Brandon Hinz gave an update to the board during Wednesday's meeting.

In the update, Hinz said with an increase in new hires, the fire department is moving to have three shifts instead of the current two shifts to effectively staff each shift.

He said in order to make this change to three shifts, Brian Montgomery has been promoted to captain.

"Brian has been with us for 17 years," Hinz said. "He's been a full-time member for 14 (years), paid on-call for three (years). He has learned this organization from front to back and has established himself as a very well-respected leader in our department."

Other items

The board approved a memorandum of understanding with the Van Buren Conservation District for Styrofoam recycling.

Kalli Marshall from the conservation district spoke about the agreement between four municipalities, including South Haven, to have polystyrene drop-off recycling locations at the transfer stations.

This agreement will allow residents to drop of Styrofoam at the transfer stations and be picked up bi-monthly.

Tri-Power Recycling will handle the pick-ups and disposal of the material. This service will have a $75 fee per site pick-up.

The board adopted an ordinance to rezone 73 1/2 Street. The plan for the property is to have 45 dwelling units, with a variety of amenities including pickleball courts, basketball courts and a pool.

During the Oct. 8 meeting, the board approved an amendment to the zoning ordinance to rezone the property at 73 1/2 Street from community service commercial to high-density residential planned unit development.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

South Haven seasonal ordinances to take effect Nov. 15

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven and the South Haven Police Department recently announced seasonal ordinance changes that take effect this month.

According to a news release, there are two ordinances including the snow control ordinance (Sec. 82-72) and the golf cart ordinance (Sec. 82-93) that will take effect on Nov. 15.

The snow control ordinance will be effective from Nov. 15, 2025 through March 15, 2026 and include:

■ Parking restriction: No motor vehicles may be parked on any city street between 2:30 and 6 a.m.

■ Exemptions: Residents may apply to the chief of police for an exemption in cases of demonstrated need or unusual circumstances (e.g., properties without driveways or off-street parking). The chief of police will review and determine whether exemptions are granted.

"While this ordinance is designed to facilitate snow removal, citations may be issued regardless of weather conditions," the release stated. "All vehicles should be parked off the roadway during restricted hours."

The golf cart ordinance includes:

■ Golf carts may only be operated on city streets between March 15 and November 15 each year.

■ Beginning Nov. 16, golf carts must be removed from city streets. Any person operating a golf cart after this date is subject to a civil infraction citation.

For questions regarding the ordinances contact the South Haven Police Department at 269-637-5151.

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 126th Year

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'AX OF MURDER'

South Haven High School presented a comedic murder-mystery by Pat Cook for their fall production entitled "Ax of Murder."

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

South Haven High School presented the comedic murder-mystery "Ax of Murder" where a script is believed to be haunted by a recently deceased man who wants revenge for his murder.

South Haven ice rink to open on Nov. 26

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced the opening day for the ice rink is scheduled for Nov. 26.

According to a news release, ice rink operations are subject to change due to weather and ice surface conditions.

Any updates or changes to the skating season schedule will be posted on the South Haven Ice Rink Facebook page.

"The city, in partnership with our neighborhood elementary schools, will continue to provide field trips for classroom skate days at no admission or skate rental cost for students," the release stated.

This year, the skate season schedule is aligned with the 2025-2026 South Haven Public Schools calendar and will offer additional operational hours for "no school days" or "holiday breaks."

The city will be offering extended rink hours for individuals or seniors who wish to skate while students are in session. The ice rink will open at noon on one Friday per month including Dec. 12, Jan. 16 and Feb. 6.

The skate rental and admission fees include:

- Skate rental: $6
- Admission: $6
- Season Pass: $70

Season passes are available for purchase at the Customer Service Department in City Hall, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or at the ice rink concession area during business hours.

For more information, contact Parks Superintendent Aaron Priebe at apriebe@southhavenmi.gov or 269-637-0778.

Covert library launches interactive story stroll program

By TRIBUNE STAFF

COVERT — The Covert Branch Library, in collaboration with Bronson South Haven Hospital, will launch a new Story Stroll this month that combines outdoor fun with literacy for families.

According to a news release, the grand opening of the Story Stroll will take place from 3 to 5 p.m. on Nov. 18 at Covert Township Park.

"As children and parents stroll along the path at Covert Township Park, they'll discover pages of a children's book displayed at different stops – turning the walk into a playful journey of reading and discovery," the release stated.

The Story Stroll is designed especially for families with elementary-aged children. This free, year-round activity transforms a simple walk in the park into an interactive literacy experience.

"The first 50 families who attend the grand opening celebration will receive a complimentary copy of the featured book, thanks to the Great Start Collaborative in Van Buren County," the release stated.

After the ribbon cutting and stroll, families can visit the Covert Branch Library for refreshments and explore the newly expanded Spanish-language collection.

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SH Scott Club to host community soup luncheon

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Scott Club recently announced they will be hosting a Community Soup Luncheon on Nov. 22.

According to a news release, the event is a long-standing tradition and will take place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at their Michigan Historic Site at 652 Phoenix Street.

As in previous years, this event will be held on the same day as the Mistletoe Market at the South Haven Center for the Arts and the Holiday Bazaar at First Congregational Church.

"This is a great time to enjoy holiday shopping opportunities and warm up with some hot soup at the conveniently-located Scott Club," the release stated.

Several South Haven restaurants are partnering with the Scott Club to provide a selection of soups including Clementine's, Julia's, Phoenix Street on Broadway, Taste, The Depot and The Lodge.

"Choose your favorite soup and enjoy rolls, beverages and dessert," the release stated. "Dine at the Scott Club or select a soup and the trimmings to go."

There is a suggested donation of $10.

"It's a beloved South Haven tradition that kicks off the holiday season," Scott Club Board Member Megan Iussig said in the release.

The South Haven Scott Club, an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) non-profit organized in 1883 and open to all, provides bimonthly educational and entertaining programs, a concert series and a monthly book discussion.

The organization participates in the Great Michigan Read and also provides member volunteers to community events including the Blueberry Festival.

The club owns and maintains its 1893 building which is a designated Michigan Historic Site on the southeast corner of Phoenix and Pearl Streets.

"Scott Club invites everyone to enjoy launching the holidays at Soup's On," the release stated.

For more information go to www.scottclub.org.

SALUTE TO VETERANS

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

The American Legion Post #49 in South Haven hosted a luncheon for veterans and began the event at noon with a salute.

Storytellers to present 'The Christmas Gathering'

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Storytellers Senior Readers Theater returns to the stage with a repeat performance of "The Christmas Gathering."

According to a news release the performances will take place at 7 p.m. on Nov. 22 and at 3 p.m. on Nov. 23 at South Haven Senior Services.

The South Haven High School Choir will also perform a medley of Christmas classics at the Nov. 23 performance.

"Ready to get in the Christmas mood?" the release stated. "This heartwarming play tells the story of a special Christmas dinner that brings to focus the true spirit of Christmas. It's perfect for the entire family."

The true story behind this family-friendly show has been featured in four different Chicken Soup For The Soul, Christmas books.

The Storytellers Senior Readers Theater group is unlike traditional theater; the actors read their scripts while sitting or standing using minimal sets, props and sound effects.

"The Storytellers, South Haven's Senior Readers Theater group, is proud to be part of the fastest growing form of theater today," the release stated. "They perform both humorous and dramatic plays and all are dedicated to the craft of live theater."

In addition to performing at Senior Services, the group also has an educational arm; performing for Western Michigan University's Health and Human Services School and Andrews University Medical School as an intergenerational teaching tool to help students better understand the population for whom they care.

The Storytellers are sponsored by Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Ticket are $10 and can be purchased at the welcome desk of the Senior Services South Haven location or at the door.

"Make this touching play a part of your holiday tradition," the release stated.

Annual Mistletoe Market returns to SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Center for the Arts will be hosting the 39th Annual Mistletoe Market where visitors can get into the holiday spirit through a selection of hand-crafted treasures made by local and regional artists.

According to a news release, there will be a preview party from 6 to 8 p.m. on Nov. 21 where attendees will be the first to shop at the market and enjoy Café Julia's snow globe feast with wine, live music and door prizes to support the center.

"From sparkling jewelry to cozy textiles, beautiful ceramics and vibrant paintings, you'll find the perfect gift for everyone on your list – and support local creatives along the way," the release stated.

New to the market this year is Jodi Burton, a professional illustrator from Berkeley, Mich., known for her cityscapes and whimsical designs.

"Step into the snowy winter wonderland of our first-floor gallery, then follow the falling snow upstairs to discover even more artists and their unique pop-up shops," the release stated.

Alex Kruger will be joining for his second year at the holiday market – his handcrafted wallets, journals, key rings and bags will be featured on the first floor.

Joining us for the first time is South Haven woodworker, Daniel Gibbons, who specializes in finely crafted utensils made from cherry and walnut wood, including cheese boards, rolling pins and spatulas.

The cost of the preview party is $20 for members and $25 for non-members.

The market will be open from Nov. 22 through Dec. 14 and is free and open to the public.

Mistletoe Market hours are from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Thursday.

"Mistletoe Market will also have many opportunities to create, including a holiday card making station and art workshops throughout the five weeks," the release stated.

For a full list of participating artists, classes and workshops offered during the Mistletoe Market and to buy your tickets to the preview party, go to southhavenarts.org.

Photo provided

Snowy Christmas tree made out of an assemblage of wooden materials created by Douglas Lowe will be available at the Mistletoe Market.

Photo provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office welcomed

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office, PC as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

According to a news release, the firm was founded in 1975 by Attorney Harold Schuitmaker.

"Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office has a long-standing tradition of providing trusted legal guidance to individuals, families and municipalities throughout the South Haven community," the release stated. "The firm is built on a commitment to personalized service, integrity and practical solutions."

As a family law firm, Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office helps families plan for the future, protect what matters most and navigate complex legal processes.

"Being part of the community means more than simply practicing law," Attorney Chris Moraitis said in the release. "It means building lasting relationships, supporting local initiatives and serving as a reliable resource for those who call this area home."

The firm offers comprehensive services in estate planning, probate, municipal law and real estate.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to welcome Schuitmaker Moraitis Law Office, PC, recognizing the firm as both professional advocates and caring neighbors, committed to strengthening the communities they serve," the release stated.

For more information, go to www.pawpawlaw.com or call 269-657-3177.

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STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
VAN BUREN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

Case No.
2025-1083-DE

Estate of: Betty Ruth King

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Betty Ruth King, died 02/06/2015. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Scott Burgoyne, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 212 Paw Paw Street, Suite 220, Paw Paw, MI 49079 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: November 10, 2025

George S. Dunn. P23916
Attorney Name
225 Broadway St, PMB 164
South Haven, MI 49090
269-637-8405

Scott Burgoyne
Personal Representative
49 Bennett Road
Iberia, MO 65486
269-486-0171

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
VAN BUREN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

Case No.
2025-1176-DE

Estate of: Teresa Lynn Ridge, deceased.
Date of birth: 07/01/1959

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Teresa Lynn Ridge, died 05/18/2023. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Trent Ridge, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 212 Paw Paw Street, Suite 220, Paw Paw, MI 49079 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: November 7, 2025

George S. Dunn. P23916
Attorney Name
225 Broadway St, PMB 164
South Haven, MI 49090
269-637-8405

Trent Ridge
Personal Representative
20262 69th Street
South Haven, MI 49090
269-767-4790

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PUBLIC/LEGAL NOTICES

To place a public notice, please send your requests to **legals@pmginmi.com.**

Please allow 48 hours to process, larger legals may need at least four business days.

SOUTH HAVEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Planning Commission of South Haven Charter Township will conduct a public hearing and the regular meeting to follow, concerning the following matter on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, 7:00 p.m. at the South Haven Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Hwy, South Haven MI 49090.
PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the item to be considered at said public hearing(s) include the following:
1. Owner, James Bard and Applicant Wallick (Graham Welling) have petitioned for Final PUD (Planned Unit Development) review to rezone the property and construct 52 units (2-16 unit and 1–20 unit apartments) at V/L (approx. 09000) 73rd Ave 80-17-014-039-20/25/30-00; approx. 13 acres.
2. Any other business that may come before the Planning Commission
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the application can be reviewed at the Township Hall during the zoning administrator hours Tues's 9-12p and Thurs's 1:30-4p or call 1-800-626-5964 and the information can be emailed shtwp.zoninga@gmail.com. Written comment may also be submitted to the zoning administrator.
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that written comments may be submitted to the Township Clerk at the address set forth below, during regular business hours of regular business days or by mail at the address set forth below, up to the date of the hearing and will also be accepted by the Planning Commission at the hearing.
South Haven Charter Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to individuals with disabilities at the hearing upon seven (7) days' notice to the South Haven Charter Township Clerk.

South Haven Charter Township Hall, Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk
09761 Blue Star Highway South Haven, MI 49090 ph: 269-637-3305

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

IN RE: THE MATTER OF: TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS FOR **THE PROPOSED ADOPTION OF:** SUNAMIR RIDER-EL **DOB:** 09/06/2021 Minor Child. **CASE NO.:** FMCE-25-018325

NOTICE OF ACTION FOR TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS AND STEPPARENT ADOPTION

TO: MERCEDES GANT

YOU ARE NOTIFIED that a Petition for Termination of Parental Rights has been filed against you regarding the above-referenced male child, Sunamir Rider-El. DOB 9/6/21. You are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to Juliana Gaita, Esq. of Juliana Gaita, P.A. whose address is 2500 N. Military Trail Ste. 303, Boca Raton, FL 33431 on or before the below hearing date and file the original with the Clerk of this Court at, Broward County Courthouse, 201 SE 6th Street, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301, before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. **If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.**
You are required to appear before The Honorable Judge Yael Gamm on **December 8, 2025**, at 10:30 am or as soon after as the matter may be called at the Broward County Courthouse, via Zoom: https://17thflcourts.zoom.us/j/697041821 Meeting ID: 697 041 821 for a Final Termination of Parental Rights hearing.
FAILURE TO APPEAR AT THIS HEARING CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO THE TERMINATION OF THE PARENTAL RIGHTS OF YOUR RIGHTS TO THE CHILD. IF YOU FAIL TO APPEAR ON THE DATE AND TIME SPECIFIED YOU MAY LOSE ALL LEGAL RIGHTS TO THE CHILD WHOSE INITIALS APPEAR ABOVE
Mercedes Gant physical description is a black female, dob 12/23/99. Brown eyes, brown hair approximately 5'6 and approximately 150 pounds.
If you fail to file a written response and/or appear at the hearing, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

This notice shall be published once a week for four consecutive weeks in Broward County, Florida and Van Buren County, Michigan

WITNESS my hand and the seal of said court on October 28, 2025, Broward County, Florida.

Clerk Name: Brenda D. Foreman
As clerk, Circuit Court, Broward County, FL

Juliana Gaita, Esq.
Attorney for Petitioner
2500 N. Military Trail, Ste. 303 Boca Raton, FL 33431
phone (561)869-3703

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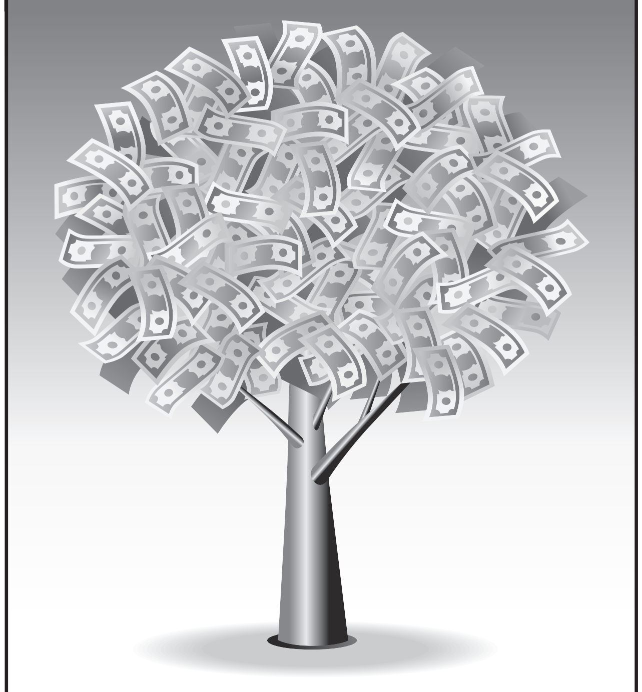
CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE PLANNING COMMISSION

On Thursday, December 4, 2025, the Planning Commission for the City of South Haven will hear public comments related to the following request(s). The public hearing(s) will be held at 7:00 P.M. at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven concerning the following:
1. Special Land Use Application – 353 Woodland Circle Dr
Ms. Corilee Kessler has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 353 Woodland Circle Dr in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-877-074-00.
2. Special Land Use Application – 964 Everett Pkwy
Ms. Jessica McGrath has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 964 Everett Pkwy in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-241-015-01.
3. Special Land Use Application – 308 Ash St
HCD44 LLC has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 308 Ash St in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-877-057-00.
4. Special Land Use Application – 314 Ash St
HCD44 LLC has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 314 Ash St in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-877-058-00.
5. Map Amendment (Rezoning) – 285 Black River St
Mr. William Zinser, on behalf of Mr. Randy Dean King, has submitted an application to rezone the property located at 285 Black River St in the City of South Haven. The parcel is approximately 0.77 acres and is currently zoned R-1B Single Family Residential District. The application seeks to rezone the parcel to R-2 Single and Two-Family Residential District. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-715-023-00.
Supporting documentation is available for review at the Building Services office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090 during normal business hours. Written comments may be submitted in lieu of or in addition to a personal appearance. Written comments must be received no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on Thursday, December 4, 2025. Written comments should be addressed to the Planning Commission and must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator at kdissette@southhavenmi.gov or via postal mail addressed to the Planning Commission and sent to 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.
Individuals requesting reasonable accommodation for impairments or disabilities should contact the City Clerk no later than five days prior to the public hearing in person at City Hall, at 269-637-0750, or at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov.

Kelly Getman-Dissette, Zoning Administrator
(269) 637-0760 kdissette@southhavenmi.gov

SELL YOUR ITEMS IN THE CLASSIFIEDS TODAY!



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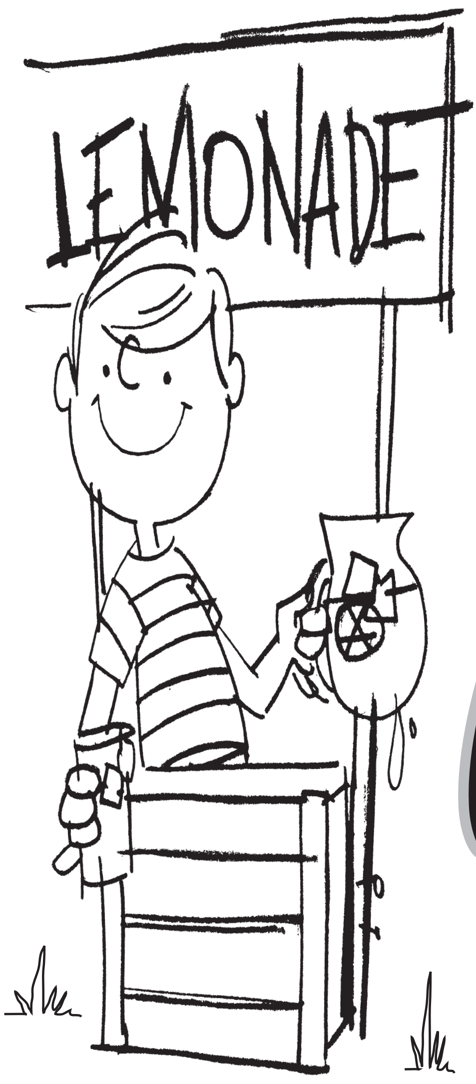

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SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: New Exhibit – "The Adventures of Liberty Hyde Bailey – Chicago: 1872." Available during museum hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring – 1 pm Tuesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring – 1 pm Wednesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

South Haven Memorial Library: Autumn Painting Contest from Oct. 20 to Nov. 10. Participants can pick up a mini canvas from the library and paint, sketch or color something for fall or Thanksgiving related, featuring either books or the library. Painting need to be dropped of by Nov. 10. The pubic can vote on the painting from Nov. 17 to 24.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

November

16 – First Congregational UCC: Fall Concert Series featuring the joHn Kennedy Show with Chris O'Brien and Joel Cooper at 3 p.m. General admission is $20 at the door.

17 – Overton Public Engagement meeting: Topic focus is on final design and next steps. From noon to 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 7 p.m. at Resurrection Life Ministries Church, 322 Elkenburg Street, South Haven.

18 – Rotary Club: Evening meeting at the American Legion beginning at 5 p.m. Todd Marcy, Senior Director of Digital Operations for the Detroit Lions will present and Larry Wittkop is the program chair.

The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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Cookie Caper
Save the date for our annual Cookie Caper, November 22nd! Just $5 buys you a plate full of delicious homemade cookies - proceeds benefit Al-Van Humane Society. Want to help bake? Cookie donations will need to be dropped off November 21st at our Adoption Center.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Wet dog food, paper towels, and 13-gallon trash bags

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SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE – BEST OF 2025

ACTIVITIES

Brewery
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – Harbor Light Brewery
3rd – South Haven Brew Pub

Golf Course
1st – Beeches Golf Club
2nd – HawksHead Golf
3rd – Lake Cora Hills Golf Club

Place to Take the Kids
1st – Lake Arvesta Farms & Arvesta Sports Complex
2nd – Sparkle & Spice Boutique
3rd – Rocket Arcade

Museum/Gallery
1st – Michigan Maritime Museum
2nd – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum
3rd – The Mitten Children's Museum

Local Wedding Venue
1st – Lake Arvesta Farms
2nd – Black River Barn
3rd – Lake Bluff Inn & Suites

Winery
1st – Cogdal Vineyards
2nd – Modales Wines
3rd – Fenn Valley Vineyards

SERVICES

Apartment Complex
1st – Park Meadows Apartments
2nd – Briar Hills Apartments
3rd – Maple Glen Apartments

Auto Repair
1st – Romes Standard Service
2nd – Walt Sicard Car Company
3rd – Woodhams Ford Lincoln

Bank/Credit Union
1st – Honor Credit Union
2nd – Huntington Bank
3rd – Consumers Credit Union

Bed & Breakfast
1st – Martha's Vineyard Bed & Breakfast
2nd – Historic Hotel Nichols
3rd – Inn at the Park

Day Care
1st – Youth Development Company
2nd – Scribbles Daycare
3rd – Grandma's Little Learners Daycare

Financial Planner
1st – Edward Jones- Paul Hix
2nd – Whiteford Wealth Management
3rd – Edward Jones- Brian Smith

SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE – BEST OF 2025

SERVICES

Hair Salon
1st – Latitude Blue Salon
2nd – Hair by Maha
3rd – Liz Ryan Salon & Spa

Heating/AC Service
1st – Mead Mechanical LLC Heating & Cooling
2nd – Haven Heating & Air Conditioning
3rd – Centisible Heating & Air Conditioning

Hotel
1st – Historic Hotel Nichols
2nd – Lake Bluff Inn & Suites
3rd – Holiday Inn Express

House Cleaning
1st – The Klean Solution
2nd – Mead Clean
3rd – Calico Cleaning

Insurance Agency
1st – Hardt Insurance
2nd – Apple Insurance
3rd – South Haven Insurance Agency

SERVICES

Landscaping Company
1st – Coastal Lawn & Landscape
2nd – Lawn Boys
3rd – Elevate Landscape Co.

Law Office
1st Butzel Long

Mani/Pedi
1st – Liz Ryan Salon & Spa
2nd – Top Nails
3rd – Fancy Fingers by Heather

Marina
1st – South Haven Yacht Club
2nd – Gun Lake Marina
3rd – Woodland Marina

Nonprofit Group
1st – Al Van Humane Society
2nd – Rotary Club of South Haven
3rd – Grace Apostolic Tabernacle

Oil Change
1st – Romes Standard Service
2nd – Village Market Xpress
3rd – Walt Sicard Car Company

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SERVICES

Pest Control
1st – North Shore Pest Control
2nd – Rose's Pest Control

Pet Grooming/Boarding
1st – Iva's Place
2nd – Fido's Paw Spa
3rd – Rover's Retreat

Real Estate Agency
1st – Century 21 Affiliated
2nd – Jaqua Realtors
3rd – RE/MAX Lakeshore

Spa
1st – Liz Ryan Salon & Spa
2nd – Hair by Maha
3rd – Latitude Blue

Tire Shop
1st – Romes Standard Service
2nd – Walt Sicard Car Company

Towing Service
1st – Mike's Towing
2nd – Harbor Towing
3rd – Romes Standard Service

SHOPPING

Antique Store
1st – Murphy's Antique Mall
2nd – Eagle Street Market
3rd – M-43 Mercantile

New Car Dealer
1st – Woodhams Ford Lincoln
2nd – McFadden's Friendly Motors
3rd – Baker Chevrolet GMC

Used Car Dealer
1st – Walt Sicard Car Company
2nd – Woodhams Ford Lincoln
3rd – McFadden's Friendly Motors

Local Clothing Store
1st – Lakeshore Trends
2nd – Glik's
3rd – Sparkle and Spice Boutique

Downtown South Haven Merchant
1st – Lakeshore Trends
2nd – Junebugs
3rd – Salt & Soul

Furniture Store
1st – Country House Furniture
2nd – Lakeshore Trends
3rd – Eagle Street Market

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SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE – BEST OF 2025

SHOPPING

Garden Center
1st – North Shore Garden Center
2nd – Menards
3rd – Barden's Farm Market

Jewelry Store
1st – Johnny's Lakeshore Jewelry
2nd – The Perfect Setting
3rd – Lakeshore Trends

FOOD & DRINK

Baked Goods
1st – Bean Box
2nd – Bunde's Bakery Café
3rd – Barden's Farm Market

Beer Selection
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – The Depot
3rd – Harbor Light Brewery

Breakfast
1st – Six Chicks Scratch Kitchen
2nd – Phoenix Street on Broadway
3rd – Bean Box

FOOD & DRINK

Candy/Chocolate
1st – Sweet Haven Candy
2nd – Kilwin's
3rd – Cookies on Call

Coffee
1st – Bean Box
2nd – Water's Edge Coffee
3rd – Biggby Coffee

Restaurant Desserts
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – Taste
3rd – Clementine's

Farm Market
1st – Barden's Farm Market
2nd – Dutch Farm Market
3rd – South Haven Farm Market

Hamburger
1st – The Lodge
2nd – Three Blondes Brewing
3rd – Kitchen 527

Ice Cream
1st – South Pier Cremery
2nd – Sherman's of South Haven
3rd – DeGrandchamps Farm

SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE – BEST OF 2025

FOOD & DRINK

Italian Restaurant
1st – Maria's Taste of Italy
2nd – Tello Italian Bistro
3rd – DiMaggio's

Liquor Store
1st – The Depot
2nd – Quick Stop Liquor
3rd – Meijer

Lunch
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – The Lodge
3rd – Bean Box

FOOD & DRINK

Onion Rings
1st – Clementine's
2nd – The Lodge
3rd – Kitchen 527

Outdoor Dining
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – Captain Lou's
3rd – The Lodge

Pizza
1st – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – Roma's Pizza
3rd – Maria's Taste of Italy

FOOD & DRINK

Overall Restaurant
1st – The Lodge
2nd – Three Blondes Brewing
3rd – Taste

Seafood
1st – Taste
2nd – The Lodge
3rd – Captain Lou's

Specialty Drinks
1st – New Holland Spirits
2nd – Taste
3rd – The Lodge

FOOD & DRINK

U-Pick
1st – Overhiser Farms
2nd – DeGrandchamps Farms
3rd – Dutch Farm Market

Wine Selection
1st – The Depot
2nd – 12 Corners
3rd – Modales Winery

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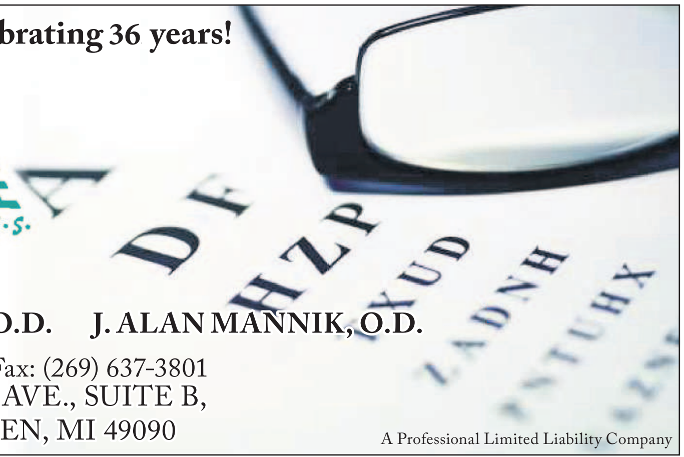
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SOUTH HAVEN TRIBUNE – BEST OF 2025

PEOPLE

Bartender
1st – Richie Garcia – New Holland Spirits
2nd – Laura Clemons – Three Blondes Brewing
3rd – Liza Poindexter – The Lodge

Chef
1st – Antoine Sykes – Three Blondes Brewing
2nd – Joel Gesiakowski – Taste
3rd – James Barringer – The Elks

PEOPLE

Chiropractor
1st – Masters Chiropractic
2nd – Dr. Izzy Vandermolen
3rd – Vassar Chiropractic

Dentist
1st – Dr. Blake Hardin
2nd – Kai Steele Dentistry
3rd – Dr. Verne Ticknor

Eye Care Practitioner
1st – South Haven Eyecare
2nd – Dr Wong, Great Lakes Eye
3rd – Advanced Family Eye Care

PEOPLE

Family Doctor
1st – Dr. Teresa Ansinn
2nd – Dr. Susan Heinrich
3rd – Marcus Wollack, PA

Insurance Agent
1st – Bethany Wanczowski, Hardt Insurance
2nd – Nicole Koblinski, Hardt Insurance
3rd – Tom Rummel, Hardt Insurance

PEOPLE

Real Estate Agent
1st – John Valenziano – Jaqua Realtors
2nd – Amy O'Sullivan – Jaqua Realtors
3rd – Lynneise Karadsheh – REMAX

Veterinarian
1st – South Haven Animal Hospital
2nd – Phoenix Road Animal Hospital
3rd – Michigan Mixed Animal Veterinary

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FOCUS

For this undocumented activist, returning to Mexico wasn't *exile*. It was *liberation*

By ANDREA CASTILLO
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

On an overcast morning in September, Hector Alessandro Negrete left his beloved Los Angeles – the city he was brought to at 3 months old – and headed down Interstate 5 to Mexico, the only country where he held a passport.

It was a place that, to him, had "always felt like both a wound and a possibility."

Negrete, 43, sat in the passenger seat as a friend steered the car south and two more friends in another car followed. He had condensed his life to three full suitcases and his dachshund mix, Lorca.

They pulled over at the beach in San Clemente. Angel Martinez, his soon-to-be former roommate, is deeply spiritual, and his favorite prayer spot is the ocean, so he prayed that Negrete would be blessed and protected – and Lorca too – as they began a new stage in their lives.

On the near-empty beach, the friends embraced and wiped away tears. Martinez handed Negrete a small watermelon.

As instructed, Negrete walked to the edge of the water, said his own prayer and, as a gift of thanks to the cosmos, plopped it into a crashing wave.

■■■

Negrete doesn't call it self-deportation.

"Self-repatriation," he said. "I refuse to use this administration's language."

President Donald Trump had been in office just over a month when Negrete decided he would return to Mexico. Methodical by nature, he approached the decision like any other – by researching, organizing and planning.

Negrete secured three forms of Mexican identification: his voter credential, a renewed passport and a card akin to a Social Security ID.

He registered Lorca as an emotional support animal, paid for a vaccine card and a certificate of good health, and crate-trained her in a TSA-approved carrier.

He announced his decision to leave in June on his Substack newsletter: "If you're thinking, 'Alessandro's giving up,' look deeper. I am choosing freedom. For the first time, I feel unshackled from the expectations of waiting."

Negrete had grown tired of wishing for immigration reform. He had built his career advocating for immigrants such as himself, including stints as statewide coordinator for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, or MALDEF, and as executive director for the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance.

He said his work had helped legalize street vending in Los Angeles and he assisted the office of then-California Atty. Gen. Kamala Harris in securing the release of a young woman from immigration detention. He was the first openly undocumented and LGBTQ+ person on the Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council.

Under previous administrations, Negrete's political work had felt like a shield against deportation. Even during Trump's first term, Negrete had marched at rallies denouncing his immigration policies.

But that was before the new Immigration and Customs Enforcement patrols that tore into Southern California during Trump's second term. On June 6, as anti-ICE protesters took to the streets, Negrete rushed to downtown Los Angeles when fellow activists told him street medics were needed.

"One of my homies said, 'Hey fool, what are you doing here?'" he recalled. Seeing Los Angeles police officers advancing on the crowd, he realized that no amount of public support could protect him.

He fled. "Thank God I left."

■■■

In mid-August, Negrete hosted a yard sale and going away party. The flier was tongue-in-cheek: "Everything must go! Including me!"

His red T-shirt stated plainly, "I AM UNDOCUMENTED," and his aviator sunglasses hid the occasional tears. Tattoos dotted his extremities, including an anchor on his right leg with the words "I refuse to sink."

"I think it hit me when I started packing my stuff today," he told a former colleague, Shruti Garg, who had arrived early.

"But the way you've invited everyone to join you is so beautiful," she replied.

Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times / TNS

Hector Alessandro Negrete boards his flight to Guadalajara, Mexico, on Sept. 6.

One table held American pop-culture knickknacks – sippy cups with Ghostface from the movie "Scream," collectible Mickey Mouse ears, a Detective Batman purse shaped like a comic book, another purse shaped like the locker from the '90s cartoon "Daria."

Negrete said the items reminded him of his youth and represented the gothic, quirky aspects of his personality.

"I was born in Mexico, but I don't know Mexico," he said. "So I'm leaving the American parts of me that are no longer going to serve me."

The back yard slowly filled with loved ones from Negrete's various social circles. There was his mostly queer softball team – the Peacocks – his running group, his chosen family and his blood family.

Negrete's close friend Joel Menjivar looked solemn.

"I'm scared it's going to start a movement," he said. "Undocumented or DACA friends who are talented and integral to the fabric of L.A. might get ideas to leave."

Another friend, Mario Mariscal, said he took Negrete's decision the hardest, though at first he didn't believe Negrete was serious. More than once he asked, "You really want to give up everything you've built here for a new start in Mexico?"

Eventually, Negrete had to tell Mariscal that his questions weren't helpful. During a deeper conversation about his decision, Negrete shared that he was tired of living with the constant fear of getting picked up, herded into an unmarked van and taken away.

"I just kept telling him, 'That's not going to happen to you,'" Mariscal said. "But the more this administration keeps doing it, the more it's in our face, the more we're seeing every horror story about that, it became clear that, you know what, you do have a point. You do have to do what's right for you."

■■■

Negrete is cognizant of the privilege that makes his departure different from that of many other immigrants. He is white-passing, fluent in Spanish and English, and moved with $10,000 in savings.

In June, he was hired as executive director of a U.S.-based nonprofit, Old School Hub, that works to combat ageism around the world. The role allowed him to live wherever he wanted.

He decided to settle in Guadalajara, a growing technology hub, with historic buildings featuring Gothic architecture that he found beautiful. It also helped that Guadalajara has one of the country's most vibrant LGBTQ+ scenes and is a four-hour drive from Puerto Vallarta, a renowned queer resort destination.

As Negrete began his new job while still in L.A., he picked a moving date – Sept. 4 – and booked a two-week Airbnb near the baseball stadium.

That Guadalajara's team, the Charros de Jalisco, wore Dodger blue felt like a good omen.

■■■

On the drive toward the border, messages poured into Negrete's phone.

"I'm sending you all my love Alessandro," one read. "Cuídate. [Take care.] Know that even though you're far away from home, you carry us with you."

"Todo te va a salir bien," read another. Everything will go well for you, it said. "Spread your wings and flyyyyy."

Afraid of being stopped and detained at the airport, as has happened to other immigrants attempting to leave the country, Negrete preferred to drive to Tijuana and then fly to Guadalajara.

Negrete's driver, his friend Jorge Leonardo, turned into a parking lot at the sign reading "LAST USA EXIT."

Negrete put on his black felt tejana hat and called Iris Rodriguez, who was in the companion car. He asked her to cross on foot with him.

"I don't want to go alone," he said.

"We're still on American soil," Leonardo said. "You can still change your mind."

Negrete ignored him.

"See y'all on the other side," he said as he hopped out of the car.

He and Rodriguez stopped for photos in front of a sign with an arrow pointing "To Mexico." Around a corner, the border came into full view – a metal turnstile with layers of concertina wire above it.

The line for Mexicanos was unceremoniously quick. The immigration agent barely glanced at Negrete's passport before waving him through.

On the other side, a busker sang "Piano Man" by Billy Joel in perfect English.

"Welcome to the motherland," Rodriguez told him. Negrete let out a deep breath.

■■■

Negrete's immediate family members, and almost all of his extended family, live in the U.S.

He was born in Manzanillo, Colima, in 1982. Three months later, the family relocated to Los Angeles, where his parents had two more children.

At 17, Negrete was one of two students in his graduating class at Roosevelt High School to get into UC Berkeley. That's when he found out he didn't have papers.

His parents had divorced and his father married a U.S. citizen, obtaining a green card when Negrete was at Roosevelt. They began the legalization process for Negrete in 1999, he said, but two years later he came out to his family as gay.

His father was unsupportive and refused to continue seeking to adjust his immigration status. By the time they mended their relationship, it was too late. Negrete had aged out of the pathway at 21.

In 2008, Negrete said, he was arrested for driving while under the influence of alcohol. Four years later, President Obama established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program to protect immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children. Negrete failed to qualify because of the DUI.

He said he got his record expunged in 2016, but – again – it was too late.

The following year, Trump began unwinding DACA, shutting out new generations of recipients, including Negrete.

Negrete waited until his last night in the U.S. to tell his mother, who now lives in Colorado, that he was leaving. He had grown tired of friends and other family members begging him to change his mind.

He had partially hinged his decision on the fact that his mom was in remission from her third bout with cancer and had just obtained legal residency. With life more stable for her, he could finally seek stability for himself.

"You taught me to dream," Negrete recalled telling her. "This is me dreaming. I want to see the world."

She cried and scolded him, promising to visit and repeating what she had said when he came out to her all those years before: "I wish you told me sooner."

■■■

At a hotel in Tijuana, Negrete's emotions finally caught up with him.

The day after Negrete and his three friends left L.A., three more friends surprised him by arriving in Tijuana for a final Friday night out together. One of them presented a gift he had put together with help from Negrete's entire social circle – a video with loved ones sharing messages of encouragement.

In Negrete's hotel room, as he and his friends watched, the mood grew sentimental.

"You're basically the one that formed the family friend tree," one friend said in her clip. "Friendships do not die out in distance."

Negrete sobbed. "Yes! Friendships don't have borders," he said.

"Every single one of you has said this hasn't hit y'all, like it's a mini vacation," he said. "I want to think of it as an extended vacation."

"This isn't goodbye, this is we'll see each other soon," he continued.

Off his soapbox, Negrete then chided his friends for making him cry before heading to a drag show.

Negrete had a habit of leaving social gatherings abruptly. His friends joked that they would refer to him as "catch me on the 101" because every time he disappeared during a night out, they would open Apple's Find My app and see him on the freeway heading home.

"We're not gonna catch him on the 101 no more," Martinez said.

■■■

On the flight to Guadalajara, Negrete's heart raced and he began to hyperventilate. The anxiety attack caught him off guard.

Negrete had worked hard to show his friends and family that he was happy, because he didn't want them to think he had doubts – and he had none. But he began to worry about the unknown and to mourn his former dreams of gaining legal status and running for public office.

"It hit me all at once," he recounted. "I am three hours away from a whole new life that I don't know. I left everything and I don't know what's next."

Many deep breaths by Negrete later, the plane descended through the clouds, revealing vibrant green fields and a cantaloupe-hued sunset.

Inside the Airbnb, he was surprised to find a clothesline instead of a dryer. Noticing the blue 5-gallon jug of water in the kitchen, he remarked that he would have to remember tap water wasn't safe to cook with. But alongside the new was something familiar: The view from his 11-story apartment showed off a sprawling metropolis dotted with trees, some of them palms.

The next day started off like any Sunday, with a trip to Walmart and drag brunch.

Negrete marveled at the cost of a large carton of egg whites ($1) and was shocked to see eggs stored at room temperature, liquid laundry detergent in bags and only single-ply toilet paper. He treated himself to a Darth Vader coffee mug and a teapot featuring characters from "The Nightmare Before Christmas."

After brunch, it was time to play tourist. Negrete was accompanied by Rodriguez, who stayed with him for the first two weeks, and a new friend, Alejandro Preciado, whom he had met at Coachella in April and happened to be a Guadalajara local.

Their first stop was the city's Spanish Renaissance cathedral, where Negrete said a quick prayer to the Virgin Mary at his mother's request. Negrete treated his friends to an electric carriage ride around the historic buildings, where he excitedly pointed out the Gothic architecture, then they bought aguas frescas and walked through an open-air market, chatting in an English-heavy Spanglish.

"I'm trying to look at how people dress," Negrete said, suddenly self-conscious about his short shorts. "I'm pretty sure I stand out."

After dinner, Negrete was booking an Uber back to his Airbnb when a message popped up: "We've detected unusual activity."

The app didn't know he had moved.

Before he arrived in Guadalajara, Negrete had already joined an intramural baseball team and a running club. Practices began days after his arrival.

Within a month, he moved into an apartment, visited Mexico City and reconnected with aunts in Mexico City and Guadalajara he hadn't seen in decades.

He reflected on the small joys of greeting neighborhood señoras on morning dog walks, discovering the depths of Mexican cuisine and the peace of mind that came with no longer feeling like a target – though he'll still freeze at the sight of police lights.

Still, Negrete remained glued to U.S. politics. In late September, the federal government detailed plans to begin processing initial DACA applications for the first time in four years. Had Negrete stayed in the U.S., he would have finally qualified for a reprieve.

He isn't regretful.

His new dreams are wide-ranging. He wants to buy a house in Rosarito, where friends and family from L.A. could visit him. He wants to travel the world, starting with a trip to Spain. And he wants to help U.S. organizations build resources for other immigrants who are considering repatriating.

The goal isn't to encourage people to leave, he said, but to show them they have agency.

"I actually did it," he said. "I did it, and I'm OK."

Now, he said, Mexico feels like an estranged relative that he's getting to know again.

72 peaks. 31 days. One legend.

Kilian Jornet's mind-blowing mountain marathon

Robyn Beck / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

Spain's Kilian Jornet powers uphill in the first five miles of the 100-mile Western States Endurance Run, on June 28 in Olympic Valley, California. The Western States Endurance Run, the world's oldest 100-mile trail race, takes 369 runners cross country from Olympic Valley, California to the finish line in Auburn, California.

By JACK DOLAN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Kilian Jornet, one of the world's most accomplished mountaineers, did something this month that left even other elite athletes gasping: He climbed all 72 summits in the contiguous United States that stand over 14,000 feet tall.

In 31 days.

That's like climbing California's Mt. Whitney – the nation's tallest mountain outside of Alaska – two-and-a-half times per day, every day, for a month.

But reaching so many summits, so quickly, was only half the battle. In fact, it was "the fun part," a surprisingly rested-looking Jornet said in a Zoom interview from Seattle earlier this month, three days after summiting Mt. Rainier in knee-deep snow to complete the grueling journey, which he started in early September.

The hard part was negotiating the spaces in between.

"If you're driving, you see the landscape," Jornet explained. "But you don't feel it."

OK, how do you feel it?

By running the hundreds of miles of remote mountain ridges, and biking the thousands of miles of desolate highway, that separate the towering summits scattered across Colorado, California and Washington.

In total, Jornet covered 3,198 miles under his own power. He biked 2,568 miles. He ran 629 miles. He climbed 403,638 vertical feet.

Tommy Caldwell, arguably the best technical rock climber of his generation and the first to climb Yosemite's nearly impossible Dawn Wall, followed Jornet's progress on Instagram. When the Spaniard finished, Caldwell posted, "my mind is officially blown."

Like many elite climbers, Jornet, 37, slips into a stoic, been-there-done-that voice when describing mountain conditions that would terrify mere mortals. But he broke character, briefly, talking about climbing the summit of Mt. Shasta in Northern California.

As often happens on that free-standing volcano, a howling gale struck just as Jornet approached the 14,162-foot summit.

Shaky video shot by a climbing partner shows Jornet's trekking poles flailing and his feet sliding around on the ice as he struggles – and fails – to remain upright in what sounds like a hurricane.

"It was crazy," he conceded, "probably the windiest day I have ever had in the mountains."

Asked why, exactly, he puts himself through so much agony, he snapped back into aw-shucks mode. He sank into his comfy seat, smiled with the confidence of a man who has parried that question a thousand times, and said:

"Why not?"

■■■

In an age saturated with professional outdoor athletes competing for social media attention and lucrative sponsorships – and in a world where the most iconic summits have been climbed, the biggest waves have been surfed and the wildest rivers have been run – one fashionable way to stand out is by setting a fastest known time, or "FKT."

Jornet's jaunt over and between those 72 summits, which he dubbed "States of Elevation" and gorgeously documented for his 1.8 million followers on Instagram, was, by all accounts, the fastest known time. It was also the only known time. Apparently, nobody else has tried to link all of those summits together in a single, human-powered push.

"Yes, it's hard," Jornet said with a laugh when asked if the constant, grinding pain was worth it. But after a while, "you get used to the discomfort, it's just part of it, it doesn't really bother you."

The finale of Jornet's 72-peak feat was a 14,441-foot volcano covered with glaciers, one of the broadest and most visually imposing mountains on the planet. Few people even attempt to climb Mt. Rainier this time of year because the weather can be so brutal.

As Jornet pedaled closer to the peak, it started to rain down in the flats, so he knew that meant snow on the mountain.

Crossing the glaciers with their immense, yawning crevasses hidden by fresh snow would have been too dangerous, so Jornet chose a steep and challenging rock route known as Success Cleaver. But even that was buried in knee-deep snow.

After summiting Mt. Rainier, Jornet posted that his U.S. journey was, "never about just the numbers, but rather a deep connection to wild places, and true test of resilience in body and mind."

Anyone else claiming that might have been met with eye rolls, but Jornet is one of the few outdoor athletes who probably doesn't need to pad his resume: He cemented his legacy as one of the all-time greats long ago.

Born just outside of Barcelona in 1987, he grew up in a ski area in the Pyrenees where his father was a mountain guide. He climbed his first mountain over 10,000 feet when he was 5.

At 20, he won the first of six titles in the Sky Runner World Series, an international competition consisting of long, high-altitude foot races that test speed and endurance on steep mountainsides.

At 26, he set FKTs for climbing Switzerland's Matterhorn and France's Mont Blanc, the tallest mountain in Western Europe. A year later, he broke the speed record climbing the bitterly cold and deadly Denali, in Alaska, the tallest mountain in North America.

A few years after that, he climbed Mt. Everest twice in one week without supplemental oxygen.

In addition to all of the technical mountaineering, Jornet has been one of the most successful ultramarathoners in history, winning the prestigious Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc, a 100-mile race through the Alps, four times.

After his early career dominating distance races in relatively cold climates, Jornet showed up at Northern California's Western States ultramarathon in 2010. It's a 100-mile race that starts near the shore of Lake Tahoe and descends to the Sacramento suburbs in late June, when the sun and temperatures can be unforgiving.

He was comically unprepared. "I didn't do any heat training," Jornet recalled, "so when I arrived I was like, 'Should I have brought water for this race?'" Still, he came in third, then returned the next year to win.

In June, he went back to the Western States 100 for the first time in 14 years. The event has evolved since then: The field is fitter and more professional. But even at his relatively advanced age, Jornet came in third, dropping more than an hour off his winning time in 2011.

Back then, he relied mostly on raw talent, Jornet said. "I train much better now, I know I need to prepare specifically and put in the work."

But does he ever just kick back and spend a weekend sprawled on the couch, a remote in one hand and a bowl of ice cream in the other?

"For me, that's not relaxing," he said, recalling the time he and his wife, Emelie Forsberg, also a world champion runner and skier, tried to take a normal vacation.

They had just completed a race on Reunion Island, off the coast of Madagascar, when they decided to spend a week on the nearby tropical island of Mauritius.

"We said we'd just sit on the beach and read books, and that's all," Jornet said. But by the end of the first day they looked at each other and wondered if they should change their flight to get back to running and skiing in the mountains. "It was like, yes, yes, yes, for both of us," Jornet said.

After years living in Chamonix, France, a hard-partying resort in the Alps regarded as the mountain sports capital of the world, Jornet and Forsberg moved to a house by a remote fjord in Norway. It's a quiet place to raise their three young children, grow their own vegetables and train in the surrounding mountains, some of which have no names.

"Sometimes when you're climbing Everest, or Mont Blanc, or Mt. Whitney, it's like you're climbing the famous name," Jornet said. As he matures, he prefers climbing mountains simply "because they're beautiful."

But he still craves big challenges.

Last year, he climbed all 82 summits in the Alps over 4,000 meters (13,123 feet) in 19 days, traveling the 750 miles between them on foot and bicycle.

"This was, without any doubt, the most challenging thing I've ever done in my life, mentally, physically, and technically," he wrote on social media. "But also maybe the most beautiful."

That got him thinking even bigger, trying to imagine the most "aesthetic line" for a similar expedition in the United States.

■■■

After landing in Denver last month, he went straight to the trailhead for 14,256-foot Longs Peak. "But I really felt like crap," he said, blaming a combination of jet lag and the air being so much drier in Colorado than in Norway.

For the first week, he wondered if he should just quit. But then, somewhere along the way, his body switched, "from fighting to adapting," and he settled into a comfortable rhythm.

After summiting 56 mountains in Colorado, Jornet hopped on his bike and pedaled 900 miles to California, where 15 more high peaks awaited. At times, the headwind was so brutal he slowed to a maddening crawl, even when going downhill.

He'd also lost 10 pounds in the mountains and, at 5'7" and about 130 pounds, his slender frame has nothing to spare. So he spent much of his time on the bike shoveling calories – even spiking his water bottles with generous helpings of olive oil – to replace lost fat.

His long slog on the bike ended in Lone Pine, a dusty town four hours north of Los Angeles, where the Eastern Sierra rise 10,000 feet, like a solid granite wall, from the desert floor.

Jornet had covered nearly 200 miles that day, and faced a 6,000-foot climb to the Cottonwood Lakes trailhead, where he would sleep before starting the toughest part of the whole trip.

The road up to Cottonwood Lakes is 23 miles of harrowing switchbacks, with vertigo-inducing views of the valley below at almost every turn. The drive, alone, freaks out a lot of people.

"It was cool that I arrived there in the dark," Jornet said, undaunted by the prospect of pedaling off the side of a cliff. "Nice to do the climb when it wasn't so hot."

The next morning he started running "Norman's 13" – a baker's dozen of 14,000-foot summits along the Sierra Crest between Lone Pine and Bishop, the most remote and punishing alpine terrain in California. He made astonishing time: cruising over 14,032-foot Mt. Langley and 14,505-froot Mt. Whitney like they were speed bumps.

But for all their imposing altitude, the standard routes up Langley and Whitney don't require any special skills, they're just long hiking trails with very little exposure to deadly falls. Things changed when Jornet reached a section called the Palisades Traverse, just up the hill from Big Pine.

There, a ridge of jagged granite rises like an upside down saw's blade over one of the last remaining glaciers in California. There are no hiking trails, just daunting towers of shattered and jumbled rock, where seemingly any misstep can lead to a thousand-foot fall.

Only the most committed mountaineers go there, and they tend to take their time, waiting for good weather and climbing with ropes and harnesses.

But when you're on a mission like Jornet's, you don't get to "choose your weather," he said. You just start and then you're committed, you have to take what comes.

■■■

What came the day he reached the traverse was a surprising, early-season blizzard. It covered the usually reliable, grippy granite with about 4 inches of snow and ice. The storm made climbing "more complicated," Jornet said, and more miserable.

It was cold and "I was completely soaked," Jornet said. But with the help of Matt Cornell, a well-known climber from Bishop, he was able to keep going and finish the 100 miles of Norman's 13 in 56 hours, shaving more than 19 hours off the previous record.

He only slept once during that span, he said, for about an hour and a half, lying in the middle of a trail.

When speed climbing over peaks, Jornet traveled light, carrying only the bare essentials to stay nourished and protected from the weather.

When possible, he was accompanied by photographers and videographers, most of whom had to be exceptional athletes to keep up.

He also stayed in contact with his press team and social media producers, and he sometimes slept in a support RV at the trailheads.

But after the frigid Palisades Traverse he indulged in a bit of luxury, pizza and a glorious night in a hotel bed in Bishop. The next morning, he hiked 14,252-foot White Mountain and then hopped on the bike for the 500-mile ride to the unexpected ordeal that awaited him on Mt. Shasta.

Having survived that with no serious damage, he biked through Oregon, finally with a tailwind, and then surmounted Mt. Rainier.

When he finally descended, instead of popping champagne in front of cameras and an adoring crowd, he and a few close friends spent a quiet night in an RV, swapping stories from the road and sharing shots of pickle juice – an inside joke that started somewhere during the trip.

"I'm not a big celebration guy," Jornet explained.

He wouldn't say what his next project will be, but several times he returned to the idea of climbing without crowds or fanfare.

"I do these things because I love them, because they bring me joy and happiness, not because I think they're very important."

One place he can sit quietly is at home in Norway, looking out the window, across the fjord to the nameless, snowcapped mountains in the distance.

He lets his eyes linger on their faces, settling on pretty lines to climb up or ski down.

FOCUS

Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune / TNS

A muskrat on a floating piece of wood in a retention pond in Concord at the Glen subdivision, April 12, 2021, in Glenview.

Muskrats fight invasive cattails and help restore biodiversity in Great Lakes wetlands, study finds

By ADRIANA PÉREZ
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

E. Jason Wambsgans / Chicago Tribune / TNS

A muskrat at Big Marsh Park in Chicago, May 7, 2020.

With their surgical nibbles, these large, semi-aquatic, buck-toothed rodents have emerged as crucial helpers for ecologists restoring degraded wetlands across the Great Lakes.

They are not the well-known, dam-building beavers but can often be found in the same marshy ecosystems. Muskrats – which are more closely related to voles and hamsters – love to eat and build their lodges out of invasive cattails.

"One of the first things that happens is the cattail comes in, outcompetes the very diverse community of native plants," said Shane Lishawa, a researcher at Loyola University Chicago. "And that prevents not only plants, but the aquatic organisms – fish, invertebrates – and then also birds and amphibians from accessing and utilizing these wetlands that are super critical for biodiversity support across the whole region."

Typha angustifolia, or narrowleaf cattail, was introduced to North America in the dry ballast of European ships during the 19th century. Where it overlaps with the native broadleaf cattail, they produce a hybrid known as Typha x glauca. Lishawa called both the narrowleaf and hybrid cattails "very aggressive wetland invaders."

While beavers are known for their ability to drastically change their ecosystems, particularly by building dams that regulate water flow, muskrats can substantially alter vegetation structure. They do so by cutting invasive cattails underwater, removing a stem that serves as a snorkel for the plant, allowing it to transfer oxygen from the atmosphere into its roots.

In areas densely packed with tall cattails, muskrats create a "patchwork" of small openings that allow plants of different heights to grow. That, in turn, creates habitat for diverse native wildlife.

It is something Lishawa noticed after years of research in a freshwater marsh on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, when the local rodent population boomed as decade-long low water levels in the Great Lakes rebounded. The animals, he said, were very apparently "affecting the vegetation – and likely increasing the biodiversity of the site."

His team shared the observation with their local partners in the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. "And they were like, 'Yeah, of course, that's what muskrats do,'" Lishawa said.

The species holds cultural significance for the Great Lakes Ojibwe Nations, in whose creation stories the common muskrat – Wazhashk in the Indigenous language – plays an important role. Even though it dies in the process, Wazhashk helps restore the Earth after the Great Flood when it retrieves a "little ball of earth" that would later be shaped into Turtle Island, now known as North America.

Equipped with this ecological wisdom, researchers from Loyola, the tribe and the University of Connecticut gathered data and found that muskrats reduced invasive hybrid cattails by 71 percent where the animals were present in the marsh that connects the Munuscong River with the St. Marys River, located between lakes Superior and Huron.

The removal of the tall plants also reduced the cover of European frogbit, another nonnative plant with floating leaves that Lishawa said likes to grow "in and amongst the cattails."

"In (the creation) story, Wazhashk's contribution and sacrifice allowed for others to have a place to live," the study authors wrote. "(It) illustrates the important role that muskrats play in modifying their environment and providing habitat for other organisms."

Because muskrats are not present in all wetlands, especially given their population decline in the United States over the last few decades, the researchers also tried to replicate the rodents' impact on cattails by mowing the plants below the waterline.

"There might be circumstances," Lishawa said, "where you would like to see the effects of this organism, but you don't have them there to work with. So, we wanted to see if we could create conditions that reflected what the muskrats did."

They found that a human management strategy that mimicked the rodent's cutting method could have a similar effect in reducing the invasive plant's cover where a muskrat population is not present.

"This is something that I, personally, would like to explore a lot more. I mean, as far as I know, we're the only people who have ever really tried doing this," Lishawa said.

Replicating beaver dams has been more widely used in ecosystem restoration, and he hopes mimicking muskrat activity leads to similar success.

"Across North America, there's been this awakening about the ecological role of beavers," Lishawa said. "I think that there's a parallel there with muskrats."

Beavers are also being live-trapped and moved to where they can help restore degraded ecosystems. Lishawa said there could be potential for a similar effort catching muskrats where they are considered a nuisance and releasing them in natural sites where a population could increase biodiversity or address invasive cattails.

"I think that's a real possibility, and I think that could definitely help enhance their positive ecological effects," Lishawa said. To be an effective restoration strategy, it would likely need to be evaluated and implemented on a site-by-site basis.

Under an ambitious restoration plan, Emiquon Nature Preserve wetlands reconnecting to the Illinois River

Enlisting the help of muskrats and imitating them could become part of larger efforts to conserve and restore coastal wetlands, which once spanned more than 1 million acres in the Great Lakes region – but of which only about half remain due to development, drainage for agriculture and other human interventions. Often, remaining wetlands have been degraded by pollution and invasive species.

In Illinois, urban development and agriculture have destroyed as much as 90 percent of the state's original marshy, swampy land, including inland and coastal wetlands.

Restoration and conservation work in these ecosystems has become more crucial as federal protections have been challenged in recent years.

The U.S. Supreme Court stripped protections from inland wetlands in the 2023 Sackett v. EPA, allowing private property development where there is no "continuous surface connection" to permanent bodies of water. After the decision, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign found that roughly 72 percent of remaining wetlands in the state are no longer protected by the federal Clean Water Act.

In the case of narrowleaf and hybrid cattails, they have been a part of the landscape for so long that many Americans are unaware their presence in these ecosystems indicates degradation, Lishawa said.

"There's this concept, in some ecological literature, about shifting baselines," he said. "Our intuitive sense of what a wetland looks like includes this species that 200 years ago was not there."

More recent invaders such as frogbit, as well as the common reed, often cause the most concern among conservation scientists due to their dramatic increase over the last few decades. However, the long-standing and often accepted presence of invasive cattails in North America makes addressing the issue all the more challenging.

But Lishawa and his colleagues – Team Typha – want to change that.

Doing so will require more research to evaluate how other organisms respond to the systematic removal of cattails, whether that is by muskrats or humans acting like muskrats.

"Depending on what we find, it could lead to more support for this type of management," he said.

HEALTH

sorbetto / Getty Images

Health headlines can be confusing

These three questions can help you evaluate them

By KIMBERLY JOHNSON and AMY EYLER
Washington University in St. Louis (The Conversation)

Every week of 2025 seems to bring a new health headline, whether it's about climbing autism rates, changing vaccination recommendations or unexpected cancer risks.

For people trying to make informed choices about their own health and that of their families, it can be tough to make sense of it all. The science can feel contradictory and confusing. Human data is messy, and studies often yield conflicting results.

Sparring between government officials and scientists can muddy the picture further.

As professors who teach epidemiology and research methods to public health students, we start our students off with a few key questions that can help make sense of the evidence. We've come to realize that these lessons aren't just for public health experts – they are tools that anyone can use to cut through bias, evaluate health claims and better understand health-related policy debates.

So next time you read a news article making a claim about a particular health condition, ask yourself these three questions.

No. 1: Are people getting this illness more often?

Media reports often highlight changes in how frequently a condition is diagnosed. Take, for example, "Autism rates in US rise again to 1 in 31 kids, CDC says," and "CDC finds nearly 1 in 3 US youth have prediabetes, but experts question scant data."

Before raising the alarm about an unfolding epidemic, it's important to consider whether the changes in rates are due to what public health researchers call artifactual changes or if they are true changes.

Artifactual changes can occur even when the rate of a disease or condition in the population has not actually changed. When researchers revise how they define a particular condition, the number of people counted as having it can change over time. Autism rates, for example, have increased at least partially due to an expanded definition of autism.

Another example is a change in what classifies someone as having high blood pressure. In 2017, the American Heart Association lowered the cutoff for diagnosing hypertension from 140/90 to 130/80. As a result, almost overnight, more people were considered to have the condition.

A condition's rate can also appear to increase when doctors become better at detecting it. The widespread adoption of the PSA test, short for prostate-specific antigen test, a blood test for prostate cancer detection, in the early 1990s resulted in a surge in prostate cancer diagnoses. Some fraction of these cases were detected at such an early stage that they may never have progressed to cause illness or death during the patient's lifetime.

Increased awareness of a condition due to media reports or public discussion can also result in more diagnoses. That's especially true when diagnosis is not based on a definitive medical test but instead on clinical observations or reports. For example, increases in ADHD cases over time may partly reflect increased recognition and diagnosis as awareness grows.

True changes in the rates of a disease or health condition reflect real shifts in the factors that cause a condition to become more or less common in a population.

A classic example of a true change in a disease rate is smoking and lung cancer. Early in the 1900s, lung cancer was a rare disease in the United States. By the 1930s, doctors were noticing more cases in men, leading to studies investigating its potential causes, including smoking.

Based on the results of numerous studies reviewed by the U.S. surgeon general's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health in the early 1960s, the committee concluded that smoking was a primary cause of lung cancer. In the surgeon general's landmark report published in 1964, which drew upon evidence from over 7,000 scientific and technical articles, the committee concluded that "cigarette smoking contributes substantially to mortality from certain specific diseases and the overall death rate."

No. 2: What kind of study led to this claim?

The strongest studies compare a control group, which does not receive the intervention being tested, and an experimental group, which does. Study participants are randomly assigned to one of these groups. This type of study design, called a randomized controlled trial, is considered the gold standard for proving when a treatment or other factor truly causes or prevents a disease.

However, a randomized controlled trial cannot be used to study potentially harmful factors such as pesticides or other chemicals found in our everyday environments. Exposing people to potentially harmful exposures would not be ethical. Instead, researchers need to rely on observational studies, which identify people who are already exposed to some factor in their daily lives – for example, those who work with pesticides – and compare their health outcomes to people who are not exposed to pesticides.

The challenge with observational studies is that the two groups of people often differ in unpredictable ways – and these differences might partly explain why one group has a higher rate of a certain disease or health condition. This is known as confounding. Statistical methods used to control for these differences between the groups are often imperfect. This is why it's risky to draw conclusions from a single study.

No. 3: What other evidence is there?

Because a single study cannot prove cause and effect, experts review the total body of research on a topic, like a jury weighing all the testimony before rendering a verdict. Evidence often includes a combination of study types, including randomized clinical trials, observational studies and laboratory research. Randomized clinical trials test whether an intervention actually changes outcomes under controlled conditions, while observational studies look for patterns and associations in real-world populations. Laboratory research aims to uncover biological mechanisms linking a potential cause to a disease, and it is usually conducted under artificial circumstances.

For example, many studies have investigated the effects of chemicals in cigarette smoke. On balance, they have found that such chemicals cause cancer by damaging genetic material in lung cells. When this damage affects key genes, it can trigger the cells to divide uncontrollably and lead to the development of cancer.

Once scientists rule out explanations based in artifacts such as more people being classified with a condition due to changing definitions, they can combine evidence from a range of studies on a topic to build a convincing case for whether the factor they are investigating truly causes or prevents a disease or other condition. They weigh all the evidence because no single study settles the question, but together the pieces form a clearer picture.

The bottom line? If you see a health claim that seems too good – or too bad – to be true, take a moment to mentally run the evidence through these three questions before deciding what to believe.

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ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac rash

By SARAH ASCH, MS, MD, FAAP, FAAD and MATTHEW MAHONEY, DO
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

When skin touches poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac plants, the oils from the plant can cause a rash. This rash can be very uncomfortable, itchy and unsightly. The medical name for this rash is contact dermatitis. Since the rash caused by all of these plants is the same, we will call it all "poison ivy," but the same rules apply no matter which plant is involved.

About half of children who come in contact with these plants have an allergic reaction to the oils in the plant. It can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days for the rash to start. The skin that has touched the plant develops itchy, red and swollen streaks or patches.

Later, blisters can form. Sometimes the blisters break open and clear fluid comes out of them. It is common for the blisters to show up in different areas of the rash at different times. Sometimes the rash will show up in areas that did not touch the plants, like the genitals. This happens when the plant's oil is spread from one part of the body to another before washing the skin.

Skin reactions to poison ivy are not contagious and cannot be passed from one person to another. However, the oil can be spread from one person's skin or on clothing or other objects until the skin and any other contaminated items are thoroughly washed. Multiple children can get the rash if they come in contact with the same plant or the oil from the plant. Touching the blisters or fluid inside them does not spread the rash.

If your child touches a poison ivy plant or touches something that has the plant's oil on it, their skin should be washed immediately. The skin can be washed with soap or dishwashing detergent. It should be rinsed with cool water to remove the soap or detergent to avoid irritation. Wash the skin gently and do not scrub. Scrubbing the skin can spread the plant's oil. Be sure to wash under the nails, as oil can get trapped there.

You should also wash anything that came in contact with the plant including clothing, footwear, toys, outdoor gear or gardening tools. It is important to wash your pet's fur if they came in contact with the plant too.

Skin reactions to poison ivy typically heal in about two weeks. While most cases can be treated at home, severe cases such as those involving the face or genitals should be seen by your child's pediatrician. The pediatrician may prescribe steroids that can be applied to the skin (topical) or, if it is very severe, taken by mouth (oral). Usually the rash gets better in 2-3 weeks, but it can be extremely itchy until it is gone.

Treating the itch is important because more scratching can make the itching worse and scratching the skin can lead to an infection. To help with itching, we recommend the following home treatments:

- You may apply calamine lotion 3-4 times per day to the rash
- You may apply hydrocortisone 1 percent cream twice per day to the rash
- Use cool, wet compresses on the rash. You can put these on top of the calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream.
- For more widespread itch, a cool or lukewarm shower or bath can feel soothing

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Dreamstime / TNS

When skin touches poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac plants, the oils from the plant can cause a rash.

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

Seasonal affective disorder is more than feeling sad

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I love the fall, but I dread the shorter days and how I feel. I've read about seasonal affective disorder, but could you please tell me more about it?

ANSWER: Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is a type of depression that's related to the changes in seasons. Symptoms typically appear in the fall, worsen through the winter months and eventually go away in the spring or summer. The answers to these questions should help you better understand SAD and determine if you should seek care.

What are the possible causes?

While the exact cause is unknown, it may be linked to reduced sunlight, which reacts with the natural chemicals in your body, like serotonin and melatonin, that determine mood and energy levels and regulate sleep.

SAD isn't just a case of the winter blues, a condition that is milder and more common. SAD symptoms can make it difficult to function at home, work and in social settings.

Who is most at risk for experiencing symptoms?

People who live in the northern half of the U.S., where daylight hours are shorter and there's less sunlight, are at more risk. It's estimated that about 20 percent of people in this region could have symptoms of SAD. It's believed that SAD runs in families, and it's more common in women.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of seasonal affective disorder to watch for include:

■ Difficulty concentrating.

■ Feeling persistently tired and fatigued, including feeling a loss of energy nearly every day of the affected months.

■ Feelings of worthlessness.

■ Losing interest in things you would typically enjoy, such as hobbies and social activities.

■ Persistently feeling down or sad.

■ Sleep disturbances, which could include hypersomnia (sleeping too much) or insomnia (difficulty falling asleep).

■ Thoughts of suicide.

■ Weight changes, including weight gain or weight loss.

What are the treatments?

■ **Light therapy:** Bright light therapy is considered an effective treatment for SAD. Research suggests that around half of people who use a bright light therapy box have good results in reducing symptoms.

It's essential to meet with a health care professional familiar with light therapy to determine the type of device needed to be effective, how to correctly set it up and the length of time required in front of a light box. They'll also help you if your skin or eyes are sensitive to light due to a medical condition or medication.

Generally, the light box should provide an exposure of 10,000 lux of light and emit as little UV light as possible. The typical recommendation is to use the light box within the first hour of waking up in the morning for 20–30 minutes. Light boxes emit either white or blue light, but the color doesn't make a difference.

■ **Medications:** Your health care professional may prescribe an antidepressant.

■ **Physical activity:** Research has shown that exercising for 20 minutes at least three days a week is similar to taking an antidepressant. Being active can help with serotonin production and boost your mood. Exercising outdoors during daylight hours increases its effectiveness in reducing symptoms.

■ **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** CBT helps people learn how to manage their symptoms of depression or reduce their severity. Talk with your health care professional about CBT and how to find someone skilled in it for depression or anxiety.

Martinmark / Dreamstime / TNS

Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is a type of depression that's related to the changes in seasons. Symptoms typically appear in the fall, worsen through the winter months and eventually go away in the spring or summer.

What can I start doing before the onset of symptoms?

If you have SAD, there are preventive measures that you can put in place, including:

■ Be physically active. Exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety. It's essential to stay active during winter, even if you're tempted to "hibernate."

■ Get outside. Spend 15 to 20 minutes outside when the sun is out. If the weather allows, take a walk outside when the sun is at its peak. Sunlight helps adjust your body's internal clock.

■ Make your environment bright. Open the window blinds and allow sunlight into your home. Sit near a window while at home or work.

■ Prioritize sleep. Go to bed and wake at the same time every day, with the goal of getting seven to nine hours of restful sleep. Excessive napping and oversleeping beyond your typical schedule can disrupt your circadian rhythm.

■ Stay connected to friends and family. SAD can lead to staying home and isolating. Engaging with friends, staying in a routine, and getting active at home and outside of the home are essential.

■ Take care of your body and mind. Eat regular, healthy meals. Avoid drugs and alcohol, which can make depression worse. Manage stress with practices like deep breathing, mindfulness and meditation.

If you have a history of SAD, talk with your health care team about a plan to better manage your mood during the winter months.

Janice Schreier is a licensed clinical social worker at the Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

So your insurance dropped your doctor – *now what?*

By BRAM SABLE-SMITH and OONA ZENDA
KFF Health News (TNS)

Last winter, Amber Wingler started getting a series of increasingly urgent messages from the local hospital in Columbia, Missouri, letting her know her family's health care might soon be upended.

MU Health Care, where most of her family's doctors work, was mired in a contract dispute with Wingler's health insurer, Anthem. The existing contract was set to expire.

Then, on March 31, Wingler received an email alerting her that the next day Anthem was dropping the hospital from its network. It left her reeling.

"I know that they go through contract negotiations all the time … but it just seemed like bureaucracy that wasn't going to affect us. I'd never been pushed out-of-network like that before," she said.

The timing was awful.

Wingler's 8-year-old daughter, Cora, had been having unexplained troubles with her gut. Waitlists to see various pediatric specialists to get a diagnosis, from gastroenterology to occupational therapy, were long – ranging from weeks to more than a year.

(In a statement, MU Health Care spokesperson Eric Maze said the health system works to make sure children with the most urgent needs are seen as quickly as possible.)

Suddenly, the specialist visits for Cora were out-of-network. At a few hundred bucks a piece, the out-of-pocket cost would have added up fast. The only other in-network pediatric specialists Wingler found were in St. Louis and Kansas City, both more than 120 miles away.

So Wingler delayed her daughter's appointments for months while she tried to figure out what to do.

Nationwide, contract disputes are common, with more than 650 hospitals having public spats with an insurer since 2021. They could become even more common as hospitals brace for about $1 trillion in cuts to federal health care spending prescribed by President Donald Trump's signature legislation signed into law in July.

Patients caught in a contract dispute have few good options. "There's that old African proverb: that when two elephants fight, the grass gets trampled. And unfortunately, in these situations, oftentimes patients are grass," said Caitlin Donovan, a senior director at the Patient Advocate Foundation, a nonprofit that helps people who are having trouble accessing health care.

If you're feeling trampled by a contract dispute between a hospital and your insurer, here is what you need to know to protect yourself financially:

Oona Zenda / KFF Health News / TNS

If you decide to stick with your familiar doctors even though they're out-of-network, consider asking about getting a cash discount and about the hospital's financial assistance program.

1. 'Out-of-network' means you'll likely pay more

Insurance companies negotiate contracts with hospitals and other medical providers to set the rates they will pay for various services. When they reach an agreement, the hospital and most of the providers who work there become part of the insurance company's network.

Most patients prefer to see providers who are "in-network" because their insurance picks up some, most, or even all of the bill, which could be hundreds or thousands of dollars. If you see an out-of-network provider, you could be on the hook for the whole tab.

If you decide to stick with your familiar doctors even though they're out-of-network, consider asking about getting a cash discount and about the hospital's financial assistance program.

2. Rifts between hospitals and insurers often get repaired

When Brown University health policy researcher Jason Buxbaum examined 3,714 nonfederal hospitals across the U.S., he said, he found that about 18 percent of them had a public dispute with an insurance company sometime from June 2021 to May 2025.

About half of those hospitals ultimately dropped out of the insurance company's network, according to Buxbaum's preliminary data. But most of those breakups ultimately get resolved within a month or two, he added. So your doctors very well could end up back in the network, even after a split.

3. You might qualify for an exception to keep costs lower

Certain patients with serious or complex conditions might qualify for an extension of in-network coverage, called continuity of care. You can apply for that extension by contacting your insurer, but the process may prove lengthy. Some hospitals have set up resources to help patients apply for the extension.

Wingler ran that gantlet for her daughter, spending hours on the phone, filling out forms, and sending faxes. But she said she didn't have the time or energy to do that for everyone in her family.

"My son was going through physical therapy," she said. "But I'm sorry, dude, like, just do your exercises that you already have. I'm not fighting to get you coverage too, when I'm already fighting for your sister."

Also worth noting, if you're dealing with a medical emergency: For most emergency services, hospitals can't charge patients more than their in-network rates.

4. Switching your insurance carrier may need to wait

You might be thinking of switching to an insurer that covers your preferred doctors. But be aware: Many people who choose their insurance plans during an annual open enrollment period are locked into their plan for a year. Insurance contracts with hospitals are not necessarily on the same timeline as your "plan year."

Certain life events, such as getting married, having a baby, or losing a job, can qualify you to change insurance outside of your annual open enrollment period, but your doctors' dropping out of an insurance network is not a qualifying life event.

5. Doctor-shopping can be time-consuming

If the split between your insurance company and hospital looks permanent, you might consider finding a new slate of doctors and other providers who are in-network with your plan. Where to start? Your insurance plan likely has an online tool to search for in-network providers near you.

But know that making a switch could mean waiting to establish yourself as a patient with a new doctor and, in some cases, traveling a fair distance.

6. It's worth holding on to your receipts.

Even if your insurance and hospital don't strike a deal before their contract expires, there's a decent chance they will still make a new agreement.

Some patients decide to put off appointments while they wait. Others keep their appointments and pay out-of-pocket. Hold on to your receipts if you do.

When insurers and hospitals make up, the deals often are backdated, so the appointments you paid for out-of-pocket could be covered after all.

End of an ordeal

Three months after the contract between Wingler's insurance company and the hospital lapsed, the sides announced they had reached a new agreement. Wingler joined the throng of patients scheduling appointments they'd delayed during the ordeal.

In a statement, Jim Turner, a spokesperson for Anthem's parent company, Elevance Health, wrote, "We approach negotiations with a focus on fairness, transparency, and respect for everyone impacted."

Maze from MU Health Care said: "We understand how important timely access to pediatric specialty care is for families, and we're truly sorry for the frustration some parents have experienced scheduling appointments following the resolution of our Anthem contract negotiations."

Wingler was happy her family could see their providers again, but her relief was tempered by a resolve not to be caught in the same position again.

"I think we will be a little more studious when open enrollment comes around," Wingler said. "We'd never really bothered to look at our out-of-pocket coverage before because we didn't need it."

Health Care Helpline, a joint production of NPR and KFF Health News, helps you navigate the health system hurdles between you and good care. KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

THE CONVERSATION

Happy Kikky / Getty Images

How to keep dementia from robbing your loved ones of their sense of *personhood*

Tips for caregivers

By R. AMANDA COOPER
University of Connecticut (The Conversation)

Every three seconds, someone in the world develops dementia. There are over 6 million people living with dementia in the U.S. and 57 million globally.

These figures will only increase in the coming years, as rates of dementia are predicted to double by 2060. If you don't know someone affected by dementia, you probably will at some point.

Dementia is incredibly difficult both for the person experiencing it and for their loved ones, not only because of the symptoms of the disease but also because of the social stigma associated with cognitive decline. Experiencing stigma makes it difficult for people with dementia to ask for help, increases anxietyand depression, and ultimately leads to social isolation.

Dementia-related stigma is perpetuated through media messages that portray people with dementia as mindless and incapable, as well as through daily interactions in which others dismiss and dehumanize the person living with dementia.

These forms of invalidation – usually unintentional – accelerate and intensify the loss of self-worth and identity that dementia patients are already experiencing.

Fortunately, educating and spreading awareness can help reduce behaviors that propagate stigma and dehumanizing treatment of people with dementia.

As a social scientist and researcher in interpersonal communication and family caregiving, I explore the social and relational side of dementia. Through my work with these patients and families, I've learned that reducing stigma and supporting self-worth for people who have dementia is often done through daily conversations.

How is dementia defined?

Dementia is an umbrella term that refers to a family of cognitive conditions involving memory loss, difficulty thinking or processing information, changes in ability to communicate and challenges with managing daily tasks.

The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, but there are several other forms of dementia that can severely affect a person's quality of life and that of their loved ones.

Most forms of dementia are progressive, meaning that the symptoms of the disease get steadily worse over time. A person with dementia can live with the disease for several years, and their symptoms will shift as the disease progresses.

People in the early stages of dementia, including mild cognitive impairment, continue to engage socially and participate in many of the activities they have always done. In the middle stage of the disease, people often need more help from others to complete daily tasks and may have more difficulty holding conversations. In the late stage, people with dementia are dependent on others and often lose the ability to communicate verbally.

Despite the cognitive declines that come with dementia, people living with dementia can maintain many of their former abilities as the disease progresses. Even in the late stages, research shows that people with dementia can understand tone of voice and nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expressions and gentle touch.

This makes it clear that people with dementia can continue having meaningful social connections and a sense of self-worth even as their disease progresses.

Focusing care around the person

In the 1990s, psychologist Tom Kitwood, who studied dementia patients in long-term care settings, introduced the notion of "personhood." Personhood is a recognition of a person's unique experiences and individual worth. He had observed that residents with dementia were sometimes treated as objects rather than people and were dismissed as being "no longer there" mentally. In response, Kitwood advocated for a new model of person-centered care.

In contrast to the medical model of care that was standard at the time, person-centered care aims to provide people with dementia comfort, attachment, inclusion, occupation and identity.

Comfort includes both physical and psychological comfort, ensuring that the person with dementia feels safe and is as pain-free as possible. Attachment and inclusion have to do with supporting a person with dementia's closest relationships and making sure they feel included in social activities.

Occupation is about giving the person meaningful activities that are suited to their abilities, while identity is about preserving their unique sense of self. According to Kitwood, each of these elements of personhood can be upheld or threatened through a person's interactions with others.

I find Kitwood's work particularly important because it suggests that communication is at the heart of personhood.

Communicating to support personhood

So how can family members and friends communicate with their loved one with dementia to help preserve their sense of self?

Researchers have identified several evidence-based communication strategies that support person-centered care both in long-term care settings and within the family.

These include:

- **Arranging the environment to support conversation.** Have conversations in a quiet place with as few distractions as possible, sit at eye level and close to the person, make eye contact and use gestures to reinforce what you say.
- **Acknowledging the person with dementia as a unique individual.** Helping your loved one remember who they were before dementia is critical to supporting their sense of self-worth. In long-term care, this is done by greeting them, calling them by name and integrating their past experiences into conversations. In families, it is done by inviting the person to reminisce about their past or reminiscing together and by talking about their accomplishments and admirable qualities.
- **Affirming and validating the person's emotions.** Even if you don't understand what the person is thinking or feeling, avoid correcting them and instead acknowledge their underlying emotion.
- **Seeking the person's input about their care.** This includes asking about their preferences for food or activities, usually using simple "yes" or "no" questions, and asking their permission before helping them with physical care such as bathing, moving or changing clothes.
- **Using simple prompts to help the person successfully engage in conversation.** This can be done through repeating or rephrasing questions, paraphrasing the person's responses, pausing to give the person time to think, and providing simple prompts to help the person remember.
- **Creating and maintaining connection.** In families, this is done by giving a hug or kiss or saying "I love you"; doing activities together such as playing simple games, making art or playing music; and joking around and laughing together.

Communication shifts as the disease progresses

Supporting personhood requires adjusting to the communication abilities of the person with dementia. Some communication strategies are helpful in one stage of the disease but not in others.

In a recent study, my team and I found that asking the person with dementia to recall the past was affirming for those who were early in the disease and who could still recall the past. But for people who were in later stages of the disease, asking them "Do you remember?" was received more like a test of memory and led to frustration or confusion. Similarly, we found that suggesting words to prompt recall was helpful later in the disease but demeaning for people who were in earlier stages of the disease who could still find their words without help.

Providing more help in conversation than is needed can lead people with dementia to withdraw, whereas appropriately adjusting to a person's communication abilities can empower them to continue to engage socially.

Ultimately, supporting a person with dementia's sense of self and self-worth in conversations is about finding a communication sweet spot – in other words, matching your approach to their current capabilities.

Changing your default approach to conversations can be challenging, but making simple communication changes can make all the difference. Meaningful conversations are the key to helping your loved one live their days to the fullest, with a sense of personal worth and a feeling of meaningful connection with others.

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Person-centered care aims to provide people with dementia comfort, attachment, inclusion, occupation and identity. **Comfort** includes both physical and psychological comfort, ensuring that the person with dementia feels safe and is as pain-free as possible. **Attachment** and **inclusion** have to do with supporting a person with dementia's closest relationships and making sure they feel included in social activities. **Occupation** is about giving the person meaningful activities that are suited to their abilities, while **identity** is about preserving their unique sense of self.

Why fears of a *AI bubble* are growing

By SETH FIEGERMAN
and CARMEN REINICKE
Bloomberg News (TNS)

Rokas Tenys / Dreamstime / TNS

Chipmaker Nvidia was worth more than $4 trillion by the end of September, making it the most valuable company in the world.

For almost as long as the artificial intelligence boom has been in full swing, there have been warnings of a speculative bubble that could rival the dot-com craze of the late 1990s that ended in a spectacular crash and a wave of bankruptcies.

Tech firms are spending hundreds of billions of dollars on advanced chips and data centers, not just to keep pace with a surge in the use of chatbots such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude, but to make sure they're ready to handle a more fundamental and disruptive shift of economic activity from humans to machines. The final bill may run into the trillions. The financing is coming from venture capital, debt and, lately, some more unconventional arrangements that have raised eyebrows on Wall Street.

Even some of AI's biggest cheerleaders acknowledge the market is frothy, while still professing their belief in the technology's long-term potential. AI, they say, is poised to reshape multiple industries, cure diseases and generally accelerate human progress.

Yet never before has so much money been spent so rapidly on a technology that remains somewhat unproven as a profit-making business model. Tech industry executives who privately doubt the most effusive assessments of AI's revolutionary potential – or at least struggle to see how to monetize it – may feel they have little choice but to keep pace with their rivals' investments or risk being out-scaled and sidelined in the future AI marketplace. Sharp falls in global technology stocks in early November underscored investors' growing unease over the sector's sky-high valuations, with Wall Street chief executives warning of an overdue market correction.

What are the warning signs for AI?

When Sam Altman, the chief executive of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, announced a $500 billion AI infrastructure plan known as Stargate alongside other executives at the White House in January, the price tag triggered some disbelief. Since then, other tech rivals have ramped up spending, including Meta's Mark Zuckerberg, who has pledged to invest hundreds of billions in data centers. Not to be outdone, Altman has since said he expects OpenAI to spend "trillions" on AI infrastructure.

To finance those projects, OpenAI is entering into new territory. In September, chipmaker Nvidia Corp. announced an agreement to invest up to $100 billion in OpenAI's data center buildout, a deal that some analysts say raises questions about whether the chipmaker is trying to prop up its customers so that they keep spending on its own products.

The concerns have followed Nvidia, to varying degrees, for much of the boom. The dominant maker of AI accelerator chips has backed dozens of companies in recent years, including AI model makers and cloud computing providers. Some of them then use that capital to buy Nvidia's expensive semiconductors. The OpenAI deal was far larger in scale.

OpenAI has also indicated it could pursue debt financing, rather than leaning on partners such as Microsoft Corp. and Oracle Corp. The difference is that those companies have rock-solid, established businesses that have been profitable for many years. OpenAI expects to burn through $115 billion of cash through 2029, The Information has reported.

Other large tech companies are also relying increasingly on debt to support their unprecedented spending. Meta, for example, turned to lenders to secure $26 billion in financing for a planned data center complex in Louisiana that it says will eventually approach the size of Manhattan. JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group are also leading a loan of more than $22 billion to support Vantage Data Centers' plan to build a massive data-center campus, Bloomberg News has reported.

So how about the payback?

By 2030, AI companies will need $2 trillion in combined annual revenue to fund the computing power needed to meet projected demand, Bain & Co. said in a report released in September. Yet their revenue is likely to fall $800 billion short of that mark, Bain predicted.

"The numbers that are being thrown around are so extreme that it's really, really hard to understand them," said David Einhorn, a prominent hedge fund manager and founder of Greenlight Capital. "I'm sure it's not zero, but there's a reasonable chance that a tremendous amount of capital destruction is going to come through this cycle."

In a sign of the times, there's also a growing number of less proven firms trying to capitalize on the data center goldrush. Nebius, an Amsterdam-based cloud provider that split off from Russian internet giant Yandex in 2024, recently inked an infrastructure deal with Microsoft worth up to $19.4 billion. And Nscale, a little-known British data center company, is working with Nvidia, OpenAI and Microsoft on buildouts in Europe. Like some other AI infrastructure providers, Nscale previously focused on another frothy sector: cryptocurrency mining.

Are there concerns about the technology itself?

The data center spending spree is overshadowed by persistent skepticism about the payoff from AI technology. In August, investors were rattled after researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that 95 percent of organizations saw zero return on their investment in AI initiatives.

More recently, researchers at Harvard and Stanford offered a possible explanation for why. Employees are using AI to create "workslop," which the researchers define as "AI generated work content that masquerades as good work, but lacks the substance to meaningfully advance a given task."

The promise of AI has long been that it would help streamline tasks and boost productivity, making it an invaluable asset for workers and one that corporations would pay top dollar for. Instead, the Harvard and Stanford researchers found the prevalence of workslop could cost larger organizations millions of dollars a year in lost productivity.

AI developers have also been confronting a different challenge. OpenAI, Claude chatbot developer Anthropic and others have for years bet on the so-called scaling laws – the idea that more computing power, data and larger models will inevitably pave the way for greater leaps in the power of AI. Eventually, they say, these advances will lead to artificial general intelligence, a hypothetical form of the technology so sophisticated that it matches or exceeds humans in most tasks.

Over the past year, however, these developers have experienced diminishing returns from their costly efforts to build more advanced AI. Some have also struggled to match their own hype. After months of touting GPT-5 as a significant leap, OpenAI's release of its latest AI model in August was met with mixed reviews. In remarks around the launch, Altman conceded that "we're still missing something quite important" to reach AGI.

Those concerns are compounded by growing competition from China, where companies are flooding the market with competitive, low-cost AI models. While U.S. firms are generally still viewed as ahead in the race, the Chinese alternatives risk undercutting Silicon Valley on price in certain markets, making it harder to recoup the significant investment in AI infrastructure.

There's also the risk that the AI industry's vast data center buildout, entailing a huge increase in electricity consumption, will be held back by the limitations of national power networks.

What does the AI industry say in response?

Sam Altman, the face of the current AI boom, has repeatedly acknowledged the risk of a bubble in recent months while maintaining his optimism for the technology. "Are we in a phase where investors as a whole are overexcited about AI? In my opinion, yes," he said in August. "Is AI the most important thing to happen in a very long time? My opinion is also yes."

Altman and other tech leaders continue to express confidence in the roadmap toward AGI, with some suggesting it could be closer than skeptics think. "Developing superintelligence is now in sight," Zuckerberg wrote in July, referencing an even more powerful form of AI that his company is aiming for. In the near term, some AI developers also say they need to drastically ramp up computing capacity to support the rapid adoption of their services. Altman, in particular, has stressed repeatedly that OpenAI remains constrained in computing resources as hundreds of millions of people around the world use its services to converse with ChatGPT, write code and generate images and videos.

OpenAI and Anthropic have also released their own research and evaluations that indicate AI systems are having a meaningful impact on work tasks, in contrast to the more damning reports from outside academic institutions. An Anthropic report released in September found that roughly three quarters of companies are using Claude to automate work. The same month, OpenAI released a new evaluation system called GDPval that measures the performance of AI models across dozens of occupations.

"We found that today's best frontier models are already approaching the quality of work produced by industry experts," OpenAI said in a blog post. "Especially on the subset of tasks where models are particularly strong, we expect that giving a task to a model before trying it with a human would save time and money."

So how much will customers eventually be willing to pay for these services? The hope among developers is that, as AI models improve and field more complex tasks on users' behalf, they will be able to convince businesses and individuals to spend far more to access the technology.

"I want the door open to everything," OpenAI Chief Financial Officer Sarah Friar said in late 2024, when asked about a report that the company has discussed a $2,000 monthly subscription for its AI products. "If it's helping me move about the world with literally a Ph.D.-level assistant for anything that I'm doing, there are certainly cases where that would make all the sense in the world."

In September, Zuckerberg said an AI bubble is "quite possible," but stressed that his bigger concern is not spending enough to meet the opportunity. "If we end up misspending a couple of hundred billion dollars, I think that that is going to be very unfortunate, obviously," he said in a podcast interview. "But what I'd say is I actually think the risk is higher on the other side."

What makes a market bubble?

Bubbles are economic cycles defined by a swift increase in market values to levels that aren't supported by the underlying fundamentals. They're usually followed by a sharp selloff – the so-called pop.

A bubble often begins when investors get swept up in a speculative frenzy – over a new technology or other market opportunity – and pile in for fear of missing out on further gains. American economist Hyman Minsky identified five stages of a market bubble: displacement, boom, euphoria, profit-taking and panic.

Bubbles are sometimes difficult to spot because market prices can become dislocated from real-world values for many reasons, and a sharp price drop isn't always inevitable. And, because a crash is part of a bubble cycle, they can be hard to pinpoint until after the fact.

Generally, bubbles pop when investors realize that the lofty expectations they had were too high. This usually follows a period of over-exuberance that tips into mania, when everyone is buying into the trend at the very top. What comes next is a usually a slow, prolonged selloff where company earnings start to suffer, or a singular event that changes the long-term view, sending investors dashing for the exits.

There was some fear that an AI bubble had already popped in late January, when China's DeepSeek upended the market with the release of a competitive AI model purportedly built at a fraction of the amount that top U.S. developers spend. DeepSeek's viral success triggered a trillion-dollar selloff of technology shares. Nvidia, a bellwether AI stock, slumped 17 percent in one day.

The DeepSeek episode underscored the risks of investing heavily in AI. But Silicon Valley remained largely undeterred. In the months that followed, tech companies redoubled their costly AI spending plans, and investors resumed cheering on these bets. Nvidia shares charged back from an April low to fresh records. It was worth more than $4 trillion by the end of September, making it the most valuable company in the world.

So is this 1999 all over again?

As with today's AI boom, the companies at the center of the dot-com frenzy drew in vast amounts of investor capital, often using questionable metrics such as website traffic rather than their actual ability to turn a profit. There were many flawed business models and exaggerated revenue projections. Telecommunication companies raced to build fiber-optic networks only to find the demand wasn't there to pay for them. When it all crashed in 2001, many companies were liquidated, others absorbed by healthier rivals at knocked-down prices.

Echoes of the dot-com era can be found in AI's massive infrastructure build-out, sky-high valuations and showy displays of wealth. Venture capital investors have been courting AI startups with private jets, box seats and big checks. Many AI startups tout their recurring revenue as a key metric for growth, but there are doubts as to how sustainable or predictable those projections are, particularly for younger businesses. Some AI firms are completing multiple mammoth fundraisings in a single year. Not all will necessarily flourish.

"I think there's a lot of parallels to the internet bubble," said Bret Taylor, OpenAI's chairman and the CEO of Sierra, an AI startup valued at $10 billion. Like the dot-com era, a number of high-flying companies will almost certainly go bust. But in Taylor's telling, there will also be large businesses that emerge and thrive over the long term, just as happened with Amazon.com Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google in the late 90s.

"It is both true that AI will transform the economy, and I think it will, like the internet, create huge amounts of economic value in the future," Taylor said. "I think we're also in a bubble, and a lot of people will lose a lot of money."

Amazon Chairman Jeff Bezos said the spending on AI resembles an "industrial bubble" akin to the biotech bubble of the 1990s, but he still expects it to improve the productivity of "every company in the world."

There are also some key differences to the dot-com boom that market watchers point out, the first being the broad health and stability of the biggest businesses that are at the forefront of the trend. Most of the "Magnificent Seven" group of U.S. tech companies are long-established giants that make up much of the earnings growth in the S&P 500 Index. These firms have huge revenue streams and are sitting on large stockpiles of cash.

Despite the skepticism, AI adoption has also proceeded at a rapid clip. OpenAI's ChatGPT has about 700 million weekly users, making it one of the fastest growing consumer products in history. Top AI developers, including OpenAI and Anthropic, have also seen remarkably strong sales growth. OpenAI previously forecast revenue would more than triple in 2025 to $12.7 billion. While the company does not expect to be cash-flow positive until near the end of this decade, a recent deal to help employees sell shares gave it an implied valuation of $500 billion – making it the world's most valuable company never to have turned a profit.

My Gig Life

What I've learned about gig work resilience

By ILYCE GLINK
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I started my freelance career in 1988. Ronald Reagan was still president, the Berlin Wall was still standing, and if you wanted to pitch an editor, you typed a query letter on actual paper and mailed it with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thirty-seven years later, I'm still here. Still freelancing. Still adapting. I've survived five major economic downturns as a gig worker, watched entire industries disappear and new ones emerge, and navigated the complete transformation of how freelance work gets done more than twice.

If you're feeling anxious about the current economic climate, or wondering whether freelance work can provide real long-term security, let me share what I've learned from nearly four decades of riding the economic waves.

The recessions that shaped my career

Early 1990s Recession (1990-1991) I was barely launched as a freelance writer when this hit. The savings and loan crisis, the Gulf War, rising oil prices – suddenly, publications I'd been pitching were cutting freelance budgets. I learned my first hard lesson: Verbal agreements mean nothing when companies are hemorrhaging money. This recession taught me to always get contracts in writing and to never count on any single income source.

Dot-Com Crash (2001) By 2001, I'd built a decent business writing about technology. Then the bottom fell out of the tech sector. The NASDAQ lost 78 percent of its value from peak to trough, and tech companies that had been throwing money at content suddenly couldn't pay their rent.

I watched colleagues who'd specialized entirely in tech writing struggle to find work for years. That's when I learned about industry diversification – not just having multiple clients, but multiple sectors.

The Great Recession (2007-2009) This was the big test. The unemployment rate hit 10 percent, housing markets collapsed, and even established media companies were laying off staff writers. But I was ready this time. I had clients across real estate, finance, health care, and education. When real estate coverage dried up, financial literacy content surged as people tried to understand what was happening to their money. I joined CBS MoneyWatch and my blogging about how people were losing their homes hit more than 1 million views per month.

COVID-19 Pandemic (2020) After three decades of practice, this bit of economic insanity should have been routine. It wasn't. Initial unemployment spiked to 14.8%, but the recovery pattern was completely different from previous recessions. Some industries never recovered; others boomed beyond anyone's expectations.

What saved me wasn't just having diverse clients and business interests – it was having developed the ability to pivot quickly. Within weeks, I was doing virtual speaking engagements and had shifted my content focus to address the new economic reality. I was hired by a former client to build a website specifically to showcase their pandemic response.

The Pattern I Didn't See Coming Each recession taught me something new, but there was a meta-lesson that took decades to recognize: The intervals between economic disruptions have been getting shorter, and the nature of each crisis has been fundamentally different.

In 1988, I thought I was preparing for cyclical downturns. I didn't realize I was actually training for permanent adaptability.

(And, as an aside, let's talk about how these major, earth-shaking economic events are now happening roughly every 10 years…)

How the freelance landscape transformed

When I started in 1988, the freelance economy barely existed as we know it today. According to recent data, more than 36 percent of U.S. workers now participate in the gig economy, but in the late 1980s, freelancing was mostly writers, photographers, editors, and consultants working with traditional businesses.

The Pre-Internet Era (1988-1995) Everything happened by mail or phone. Research meant libraries and phone interviews. Payment meant checks that took weeks to arrive and days (or weeks) to clear. There were no freelance platforms, no online portfolios, no digital payments.

The barriers to entry were higher, but so was the barrier to competition. If you could navigate the system – get your queries to the right editors, build relationships with art directors, establish credibility with sources – you had a sustainable business.

The Internet Revolution (1995-2005) Email changed everything first. Suddenly, I could pitch editors instantly and deliver articles as attachments. Research became faster and broader. But the real transformation was the democratization of publishing.

Websites needed content. Lots of content. Companies that had never hired writers before suddenly needed web copy, newsletters, blog posts. The freelance market exploded, but so did the competition.

The Platform Era (2005-2015) Upwork launched in 2003 (as Elance). Suddenly, anyone could bid on freelance projects from anywhere in the world. The number of freelancers in the U.S. grew from about 10 percent of the workforce in 2005 to 15.8 percent by 2015.

This was terrifying and liberating simultaneously. I could compete for projects I never would have heard about before, but I was also competing against writers who would work for $5 an hour. It was scary and thrilling all at the same time.

Influencing started to become a businesses – and something you had to do to get noticed. While it felt like you were giving away the "milk for free," social media allowed everyone to be an expert, to showcase their wares, to demonstrate that they, too, had something to share.

The Creator Economy Era (2015-Present) Social media platforms became publishing platforms pushing empires. Substack, Medium, LinkedIn, Twitter – suddenly everyone could build an audience directly. The relationship between freelancers and traditional media shifted fundamentally.

Now I'm not just competing with other freelancers for assignments. I'm building my own media properties while also serving traditional clients. The skills I developed over decades – building relationships, understanding audiences, adapting to new formats – became more valuable than ever.

The evolution of economic threats

Each recession taught me that the next crisis wouldn't look like the last one.

1990S: Traditional cyclical recession Too much debt, overheated economy, predictable boom-bust cycle. The solutions were familiar: cut costs, wait it out, rebuild when credit loosened.

2001: Technology bubble burst This was my first experience with a sector-specific collapse that had economy-wide implications. It taught me that being too concentrated in any single industry – even a "safe" one – was dangerous.

2008: Financial system collapse This wasn't just a recession; it was a fundamental breakdown of trust in financial institutions. Home prices fell 33 percent nationally, and traditional safe havens like real estate became toxic.

THE LESSON: Diversification isn't just about having different clients. It's about understanding systemic risks and building buffers that can withstand not just individual failures, but systemwide breakdowns.

2020: Global pandemic A health crisis that became an economic crisis, but with completely unprecedented government intervention. The federal government spent over $4 trillion in pandemic relief, fundamentally altering labor markets and business models.

Some freelancers thrived as companies shifted to remote work and needed help navigating digital transformation. Others saw their industries disappear overnight. The lesson: Adaptability isn't just about surviving downturns – it's about recognizing and capitalizing on the opportunities that emerge from chaos.

2025 – and beyond Although it hasn't been 10 years, it feels as though another recession is just around the corner. This year has been full of ups and downs as businesses try to plan and cope with the unknowable: What will happen next? Tariffs have complicated the business world. In this next downturn, which I'm already planning for, the game will be all about leveraging relationships.

What I wish I'd known in 1988

Start building your emergency fund immediately. I spent the first decade living project to project. Every recession taught me the same lesson: You need a bigger cash buffer than you think. Not 3-6 months of expenses, but 12-18 months. When you're freelancing, that cushion is your business insurance.

FOCUS ON THE MATH: Relationships compound over decades. That editor who rejected your pitch in 1995 might become your best client in 2010. The colleague who seemed like competition in 2002 might send you your biggest project referral in 2020. I have clients today I first met 25 years ago. Business partners I met 14 and 10 years ago. Reputation and relationships compound more powerfully than any investment.

Technology skills are your minimum viable product. In 1988, being able to use a computer was a competitive advantage. By 2000, it was table stakes. Every technological shift creates new opportunities for those who adapt quickly and new risks for those who don't. Today, it's fluency with AI, and the systems that depend on LLMs.

I've had to learn: email, web browsers, content management systems, social media platforms, video conferencing, podcasting equipment, digital payment systems, project management tools, and AI writing assistants. The learning never stops.

Economic cycles are getting shorter and more unpredictable. The old model of 7-10 year economic cycles is dead. Recent analysis suggests business cycles are becoming more frequent and more volatile. You can't build a freelance career assuming long periods of stability punctuated by occasional disruptions. You need to build for continuous adaptation.

Industry expertise is both your greatest asset and your biggest risk. Deep expertise in any field makes you incredibly valuable to clients in that space. But industries can disappear faster than ever. I've watched colleagues who were experts in newspaper layout, magazine photography and travel writing struggle as their entire sectors contracted.

The solution isn't to avoid specialization – it's to continuously expand your expertise into adjacent areas and to stay alert to early warning signs of industry shifts.

The skills that transcend economic cycles

After 37 years, I've identified the capabilities that matter regardless of what the economy throws at you:

PATTERN RECOGNITION: The ability to spot trends before they become obvious. This comes from paying attention to weak signals and connecting dots across different industries and data sources.

RAPID LEARNING: Not just being able to learn new things, but being able to learn them quickly enough to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: The ability to build trust and maintain connections across long time horizons. Your network becomes your net worth, but only if you nurture it consistently.

FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE: The ability to save during good times and spend strategically during bad times. This sounds simple but requires genuine discipline when everyone around you is either panicking or celebrating.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION: The ability to make rational decisions when markets are irrational and to maintain professional relationships when everyone is stressed.

What the next recession will look like

I don't know when the next major economic disruption will hit, but I can make some educated guesses about what it might look like based on current vulnerabilities:

TECHNOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT: AI and automation are eliminating entire categories of work faster than new categories are being created. Recent studies suggest up to 47 percent of U.S. jobs could be automated within the next two decades.

CLIMATE-RELATED DISRUPTIONS: Physical climate changes are creating new categories of economic risk that don't follow traditional recession patterns. Supply chain disruptions, infrastructure failures and insurance market collapses could trigger economic downturns that look nothing like previous recessions.

GEOPOLITICAL INSTABILITY: Global supply chains and digital connectivity create new systemic risks. Trade and tariff wars, cyber attacks, and currency instability could create economic disruptions that cross traditional industry boundaries.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS: Aging populations in developed countries and labor shortages in key sectors are creating economic pressures that don't fit traditional recession models.

The freelancers who thrive through the next crisis will be those who've built capabilities that work across multiple scenarios, not those who've optimized for any single economic environment.

Finally, The Long View

Here's what 37 years as a gig worker has taught me: Every economic crisis feels existential when you're living through it, but each one also creates opportunities that didn't exist before.

The 1990s recession forced me to professionalize my business practices. The dot-com crash taught me industry diversification. The 2008 financial crisis pushed me to build deeper financial buffers. The pandemic accelerated my digital transformation and opened entirely new revenue streams.

None of these lessons were pleasant, but each one made me more resilient for the next crisis.

If you're just starting your freelance career, or if you're a traditional employee thinking about making the jump, understand this: Economic uncertainty isn't a bug in the freelance lifestyle – it's a feature. It forces you to build capabilities that make you anti-fragile.

It's never been easier to start a business. And, the goal isn't to avoid economic downturns. That's inevitable. Instead, focus on building a career that gets stronger with each one.

Want more practical money advice? Follow my work for weekly insights on building wealth, no matter where you're starting from. Because everyone deserves financial freedom – but not everyone is willing to do what it takes to get there. And, be sure to visit my website, Think-Glink.com.

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FOOD

Sauerkraut is made with cabbage and salt.
Dreamstime / TNS

Make your own *sauerkraut* to top Reuben bites and those game-day brats

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Sauerkraut, a must for stadium brats and roast pork, is simple and easy to make. It relies on a simple hands-off recipe that requires just two ingredients – cabbage and salt.

Given the right conditions, the two create enough acid to preserve the vegetable. The same process is also used to make sour dill pickles, kimchi and hot sauces like Tabasco, in which the chile peppers are fermented and blended into a paste.

The method, called lacto-fermentation, dates back thousands of years and was used by many cultures, from Korean and Chinese to Eastern European. Unlike "pickling" that relies on the acid in vinegar to flavor and preserve vegetables, this process engages a specific kind of bacteria – lactobacillus – to create the acid to do its thing. Think of sauerkraut as the gateway to other lacto-fermented vegetables. Once you get the hang of it, move on to kimchi, dill pickles, hot sauces and more.

Unlike pickling, there's no cooking involved. The shredded cabbage is mixed with kosher salt and stored in a ventilated jar. In just a week's time, the naturally occurring bacteria on the leaves converts the cabbage's sugars into the acid to give the kraut its distinct sour flavor, which will become stronger over time. Taste it along the way, and when it reaches the desired level of pungency – that snap and pop – transfer it to the refrigerator to slow the fermentation process.

The sauerkraut will keep for several months in a covered jar in the refrigerator, ready to pile onto brats and simmer with apples for roast pork or chicken. It sparks Reubens, grilled cheese and tuna salad sandwiches, and punches up hearty beef stews and hefty hot dishes.

I like it best with smoked salmon or piled on griddled open-faced corned beef and Swiss cheese sandwiches on rye. Try it as open-faced appetizer sandwiches, like we did in the photo. Use thinly sliced rye bread, spread with homemade Thousand Island dressing (see recipe) and layer with corned beef and Swiss cheese. Lightly broiled and then garnished with the kraut, it's a quick light dinner or a snappy addition to your game-day feast.

Red Cabbage Sauerkraut

Makes about 8 cups.
From Beth Dooley.

1 medium red cabbage (about 3 lb.)
2 tbsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. caraway or fennel seeds, optional

Directions

Halve the cabbage through the stem and remove the core. Cut each half in half, and then shred the cabbage. Place the shredded cabbage in a large bowl. Sprinkle the salt over the cabbage and, using clean hands, massage the cabbage until it becomes limp, releases its juices, and is reduced by half in volume, working in the caraway or fennel seeds, if using.

Transfer the cabbage and its juices into clean jars and use a wooden spoon to pack it down. Put a cabbage leaf on top of the shredded cabbage to help keep the cabbage covered with the juice. Keep packing it down through the day to ensure the cabbage is covered with juice. The cabbage should be fully submerged in the liquid; if it's not, dissolve 1 1/2 teaspoons of kosher salt in 1 cup of room temperature water and add to the jars. At the end of the day, place lids on the jars, but do not screw them on tight; This allows the sauerkraut to "breathe" as it ferments.

Store the jars at room temperature in a dark place, keeping them covered for at least 5 days and up to 2 weeks. Start tasting the sauerkraut after 5 days, it should be briny and tangy. The longer it sits, the stronger the flavor. When it's ready, tightly screw on the lids and store in the refrigerator for about 4 months.

Thousand Island Spread

Makes 1/2 cup.

All the flavors of the dressing, but in spreadable form. From Beth Dooley.

1/3 c. mayonnaise
2 tbsp. ketchup
1 tbsp. dill pickle relish

Directions

Put all of the ingredients into a small bowl and stir to combine. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to 3 months.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleyskitchen.com.

Butternut squash is the key ingredient of the soup you've been craving

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS
Butternut squash soup sprinkled with toasted coconut.

The humble butternut squash is my go-to for a true autumn soup.

The thin-skinned Cucurbita is plush, earthy and just a tad sweet. Delicious cubed and roasted or sautéed, when baked and puréed it becomes an especially versatile base for soup. Season it with curry spices, or the heat of Mexican chiles. Try whisking in miso, ginger and soy, or fragrant rosemary, parsley and thyme. Stick to Yankee-style cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom and maple syrup with a shot of cider vinegar to keep things in line. Please, though, taste as you go and do not over season so the luscious nutty notes of the squash shine through.

Roasting the squash first deepens its flavor by caramelizing the natural sugars while the flesh melts into a rich mash. Once it's out of the oven, cook the squash with aromatics like shallot and garlic and enough stock to purée it into a thick, creamy soup without the addition of cream. Its golden hues and cozy texture are like that favorite sweater. This is the kind no-recipe dish to whip up on the fly, just right for a quick dinner when the winds howl and the temperatures drop.

In the market, look for butternut squash with a long fat neck for more of the flesh; the seeds hide in the bulb. It should be heavy for its size, free of nicks and gashes. Store it in a cool dry place until ready to use. You can make this soup ahead; in fact, you should to give the flavors time to marry.

The soup will keep in the fridge for at least three days and freezes nicely, too. Serve with a cheese toasty or a warm crusty baguette and tart green salad, for dinner in a bowl.

Squash Soup Three Ways

Serves 4 to 6.

Customize this basic squash soup with different flavors depending on your mood. These are just suggestions, feel free to add your own. From Beth Dooley.

1 medium butternut squash (2 1/4 to 2 1/2 lb.), halved lengthwise and seeded
3 tbsp. oil of choice, such as coconut, olive or butter
1/4 c. chopped shallot
2 cloves garlic, crushed
4 c. vegetable or chicken stock, plus more if needed
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1/4 c. whole milk Greek style yogurt or sour cream, for optional garnish
1/4 c. toasted pumpkin seeds, for optional garnish
2 tbsp. chopped parsley, for optional garnish

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Brush the cut halves of the squash with some of the oil and place cut-side down on the parchment. Roast the squash until very tender and wrinkled, about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Remove and allow to cool.

In a large heavy soup pot set over medium heat, add the oil or butter and sauté the onion and shallot until tender, about 3 to 4 minutes. Scoop the squash out of the peel and add to the pot; no worries if some of the peel ends up in the soup. Stir in the stock and purée using an immersion blender. (Alternatively, work in batches and purée in a stand blender and return soup to the pot.)

Season the soup with one of these flavor profiles:

Curried Squash Soup: Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons curry powder, 1 tablespoon honey and 1 tablespoon lemon, to taste.

Mexican Squash Soup: Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons Tajin seasoning, 1 tablespoon agave or brown sugar, and 1 tablespoon lime juice, to taste.

Classic New England-Style Squash Soup: Substitute 1/2 cup apple cider for 1/2 cup stock, stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons pumpkin pie spices, 1 tablespoon maple syrup and 1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar, to taste.

Reduce the heat and simmer the soup, stirring occasionally, for about 8 to 10 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Garnish with small dabs of whole milk Greek style yogurt or sour cream, toasted pumpkin seeds and chopped parsley.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleyskitchen.com.

QUICK FIX

Chickpea Curry and Walnuts

By LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Savor the warm, aromatic flavors of India with this vibrant vegetarian curry. Walnuts bring a nutty depth and satisfying crunch, while tender baby kale is gently wilted in the sauce. It's milder than mature kale and blends seamlessly into the curry, adding fresh green notes without overpowering the dish.

A note about spices: Curry powder, ground ginger and ground cumin are used. Spices lose their flavor after about 6 months. If yours are slightly grey or have lost their aroma, it's time for new ones. They should be stored in a dry place away from sunlight or heat.

Shopping list

To buy: 1 small bottle ground ginger, 1 small bottle curry powder, 1 small bottle ground cumin, 1 can reduced sodium chickpeas, 1 can lite coconut milk, 1 can olive oil spray, 1 can low sodium diced tomatoes, 1 container fresh baby kale, 1 bunch cilantro, and 1 package whole wheat pita breads, 1 package dry roasted walnuts without added salt, 1 container reduced fat sour cream.

Staples: olive oil, onion, garlic, salt and fresh peppercorns.

Chickpea Curry and Walnuts

Recipe by Linda Gassenheimer

olive oil spray
1 cup sliced onion
4 chopped garlic cloves
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1 tablespoon curry powder
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 cup rinsed and drained reduced sodium canned chickpeas
1 cup lite coconut milk
1 cup drained low sodium diced tomatoes
1 cup baby kale
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
1/2 cup walnuts, dry roasted without added salt
2 tablespoons reduced-fat sour cream
2 whole wheat pita breads, cut in quarters

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat and spray with olive oil spray. Add onion, garlic and ginger. Saute 2 to 3 minutes. Add curry powder and ground cumin. Saute another minute, stirring to combine all ingredients. Add the chickpeas, coconut milk and tomatoes. Stir again. Cook 5 minutes, combine all ingredients as they cook. Add the kale and stir until wilted, 1 minute. Add salt and pepper to taste. Divide in half and serve on two dinner plates. Sprinkle cilantro and walnuts on top. Add a tablespoon of sour cream to each dish. Serve the pita bread with the dishes.

Yield 2 servings.

Per serving: 619 calories (48 percent from fat), 33.0 g fat (8.9 g saturated, 8.1 g monounsaturated), 6 mg cholesterol, 21.8 g protein, 70.1 g carbohydrates, 14.2 g fiber, 482 mg sodium.

Jim James of My Morning Jacket performs onstage during A Grammy Salute to the Beach Boys at Dolby Theatre on Feb. 8, 2023, in Los Angeles.
Amy Sussman / Getty Images for The Recording Academy / TNS

How My Morning Jacket crafted 'Z' into a timeless rock classic that defies nostalgia

By NATE JACKSON
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

There's no shortage of bands commemorating their glory days as decade anniversaries of albums fly by. Yet few landmark releases feel not only fresh but forward-thinking 20 years after they were recorded. My Morning Jacket stumbled onto this kind of brilliance in October 2004 when it released its fourth studio album "Z." Across 10 tracks of lush, euphoria-driven rock 'n' roll, the band captured a notable tone shift in its sound that melded Southern rock, haunting folk, psychedelic soul laced with jam band energy. It's a set of songs that still make up a huge chunk of the bands live show. In September the band performed the album in its entirety to a sold-out Hollywood Palladium for its 20th anniversary.

"We still play these songs all the time," said front man and principal songwriter Jim James in a recent conversation. "So it's not like we broke up after we released 'Z' and then we got back together 20 years later to play these songs, and it's such a trip. We've been playing them nonstop for 20 years."

Shortly after the release of its 10th studio album "is," the band put out a deluxe reissue of "Z" that includes four B-sides and a whole album's worth of demo versions of songs like "Wordless Chorus," "Off the Record" and Dodante. Recently James spoke to The Times about the enduring power of "Z" and the joy of going back to the beginning of the album's origins to give himself and his fans a new appreciation for the groundbreaking sound the band created.

Q: The rerelease of "Z" was prefaced earlier this year with a full-album show at the Palladium. What was it like revisiting the album on stage first before it came out (again) on vinyl and streaming?

A: This is our fourth album now to hit the 20-year mark. So we've got some experience now doing these album shows. And it's funny because some of the earlier albums we don't play all the songs from them so we had to go back and relearn a lot of songs. But the songs from "Z" we pretty much play all the songs all the time. So it's pretty hilarious how it involved no effort. It just involved playing them in that order of the sequence of the album. But we kind of laughed about that. We're like, man, we don't really even have to do any research or anything. We were all kind of reflecting just on how grateful we are that we like playing all the songs still. It's such a great feeling to play songs for 20 years and never really get tired of them. People still want to hear them and there's still excitement there, and they still feel fresh. It's really a beautiful thing.

Q: This was your first album using an outside producer. What was that like for you as the songwriter to step in the studio with John Leckie to help you realize your vision with "Z"?

A: It was so great, because I really needed somebody who could work with me and not let our egos clash too much. John was just really great about coming in and respecting what I wanted to do, but also voicing his opinion and what he liked and what he didn't like and when he thought we could do better. And it was just really so refreshing and so good for us to have him there. I mean, his track record speaks for itself, he's somebody who you can trust right off the bat, just because of all the things they've done in the past. He's such a soft-spoken gentleman but he also has this hilarious, brutal honesty about him, which was always really great.

Q: Your lineup had also changed between the previous album "It Still Moves" and "Z" – adding keyboard player Bo Koster and guitarist Carl Broemel who are still in the band today. So was that like stepping in the studio with the "new guys" for the first time?

A: It was really nerve-racking and really exciting all at once. We had some touring experience under our belt with Bo and Carl, so we kind of knew that it was working out on that level, but we'd never really recorded before, so it was a real test for all of us. And I think we all knew that. So everybody brought their A game to the session and we took it really seriously, but we also had a lot of fun and just really kind of got to know each other. That was good to do that out in the middle of nowhere, out there in the Catskills, up at the studio. It gave us some time to really bond without a lot of the real-world stuff coming in or other people coming in. So I think that was really important, that we did it that way.

Q: Do you remember what song came out of the sessions first?

A: "It Beats 4 U" was the first one, because that was one we had already played live before we started recording. So I think that was the first song that we started messing with. But I think they all were kind of coming to life around the same time. So by the time we got in there to start unpacking them, I had already written them and kind of made the demos of them and stuff.

Q: It's great that you included so many demo versions of your songs on this re release. What was the process like of locating these, sifting through and sequencing which ones you wanted to put on the album?

A: Well, I love demos for a lot of my favorite bands – I love it when I get to hear the demos from the albums. So I'm always saving all that stuff; with my own stuff I'm always compiling all the demos, because that's half the fun to me. Because sometimes you get this just like a beautiful glimpse into the song. Quite often, I end up liking the demo more than I like the actual album, song because you get a whole, whole new view of it. It's also interesting when you're sequencing for vinyl, because you don't have unlimited time so you kind of got to pick and choose, and that kind of forces you to just choose the best. There's a whole other round of band demos and then there were my demos, so there were a lot of things to choose from. But it kind of helps me to look at it in vinyl format. There's still something about the vinyl time limit that helps with quality control. Just kind of pick the ones that I feel are most effective and then try and make a fun sequence so that hopefully, if somebody's into them, it's kind of like you get a bonus album that you can listen to.

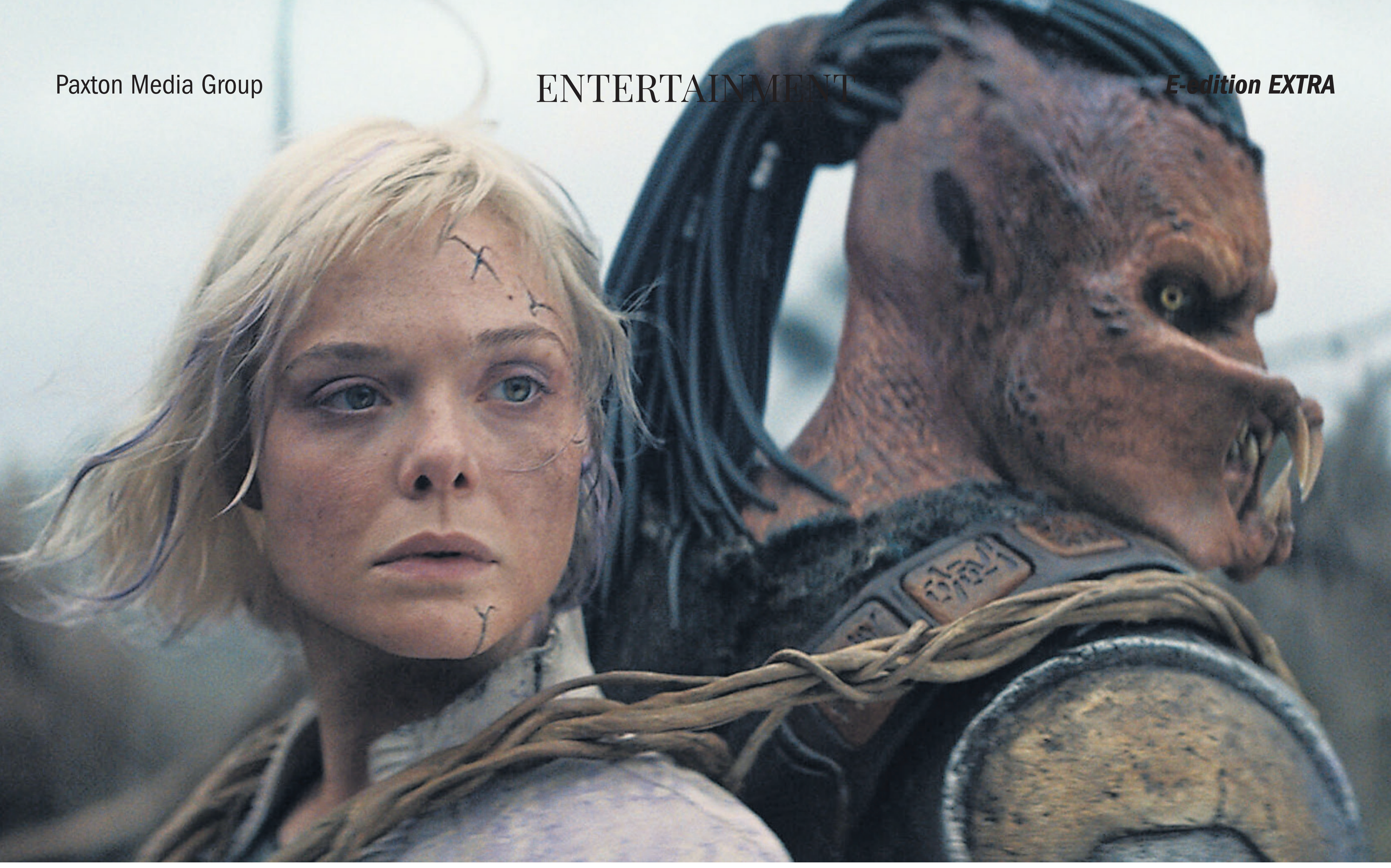
We had four true songs, B-sides, that we really love too, that weren't demos. So that was really nice to finally get those out, because those had been on different soundtracks. And then one wasn't even released. So I don't think that those weren't even on streaming or anything for years and years. So it's really cool to have those out kind of everywhere now, because I've always liked all those songs and been proud of those songs too. And I think most bands know the feeling of you know when you make a record. Sometimes songs just don't fit the record, even if you still love the songs.

Q: Were you playing any of those live at the point where you released the album the first round, or did you shelve them for later?

A: We've always played "Where to Begin" live – off and on. We've also tried "Chills" a couple times, and I think we did "How Could I Know" a couple times. We've never played "The Devil's Peanut Butter," we kinda forgot that one existed until this whole [album rerelease] process started, and I found that song again. So we'll probably play that one somewhere out on the next leg.

Q: Was this process something that you enjoy doing, like, in terms of your how to, sort of like, re examine an album?

A: I really love it because I just feel so grateful that anybody even gives a s---, you know? I mean, so there's that part of me that's just so grateful to even still be in the game, talking about this. But beyond that, it's really cool for me because it's like jumping in a time machine and going back and looking at that point in my life and getting perspective on where I am now, and seeing how I've grown and asking "where have I changed? Where have I not changed?" I look back and with all of these albums as they come up to this 20-year mark, and I see I've always been really mean and hard on myself, on Jim, but I know that Jim was doing the best he could at each time. That's the one thing I've always kind of been able to see, to get myself through, to not be too hard on myself. I know I was giving it everything I had, so whether I would change things about it as I am today or not – we all look back on the past, and maybe there's things we'd do differently, but it gives me a lot of comfort to know that I was trying as hard as I could, and all the guys in the band were trying as hard as they could. It really makes me feel proud of us for just putting in the time and effort.



20th Century Studios / TNS

Elle Fanning, left, and Dimitrius Schuster-Koloamatangi in "Predator: Badlands."

MOVIE REVIEW

Who knew a *'Predator: Badlands'* movie could be this fun?

By ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News (TNS)

The "Predator" franchise receives an unexpected blast of fun – and a healthy dose of humor – in "Predator: Badlands," one of the year's most thrilling, lively action movies. Surprised? Same here. Who knew what this nearly 40-year-old series needed was a solid deployment of jokes?

Director Dan Trachtenberg, who is nothing if not driven to prove the malleability of the "Predator" series – he made 2022's sparse survival thriller "Prey" as well as this year's viciously violent animated feature "Predator: Killer of Killers" – takes a hard left here and goes the buddy comedy route with "Badlands."

And against all odds, it works, thanks to a smart reinvention of the story, a sparklingly charismatic performance from Elle Fanning and a bold belief in the director's vision. "Predator: Badlands" – the seventh movie in the "Predator" series – is a ridiculous, amusing, wildly entertaining thrill ride, and I absolutely loved it.

On the planet Yautja Prime, a Yautja – that's the technical term for Predator, the killer beast we first saw stalking Arnold Schwarzenegger and his impressively muscle-bound crew in 1987's "Predator" – named Dek (Dimitrius Schuster-Koloamatangi) is play-fighting with his big brother, Kwei (Mike Homick). Kwei is trying to get Dek ready for the big, bad world of Predatoring, and that involves a near-deadly battle inside a treacherous cave. Y'know, just horsin' around. Meanwhile, Dek's father, Njohrr (also Schuster-Koloamatangi, not that you can tell underneath the suit and makeup), is ready to take out his son for being too weak and not emblematic enough of the family's warrior spirit.

While defending his brother, Kwei is killed (by his own father!) and Dek is sent to a far-off planet to prove his worthiness to the clan. Before Dek can even process his grief – and yes, "Predator: Badlands" is a movie that acknowledges Yautja grief – Dek crash lands on the planet of Genna, where everything from the plant life to the native creatures are trying to kill him.

> **'Predator: Badlands'**
>
> **Grade:** B+
>
> **MPA rating:** PG-13 (for sequences of strong sci-fi violence)
>
> **Running time:** 1:47
>
> **How to watch:** In theaters

There, after a run-in with some nasty killer vines and a species of exploding herbs – the introduction of the planet and its terrain is not unlike that of "The Neverending Story" – Dek makes the acquaintance of Thia (Fanning), a chatty android who has been severed at the waistline. She's a product of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, which effectively brings the "Alien" brand (back) into the "Predator" world, not that we need any more "AVP" movies, although in Trachtenberg's capable hands, anything seems possible.

Thia persuades Dek to help free her, and off these two go a-trotting across fields of razor grass, Thia strapped to Dek's back like a backpack. Dek is trying to track down a Kalisk, the biggest, baddest creature in the land, so he can slay it and prove his worth to his father, or maybe just throw it back in his face.

Thus begins the most unlikely team-up of the year, as a Predator and half an android go off on an adventure together. Along the way they pick up Bud, a cuddly creature who spits a mouthful of goo on Dek to mark his territory, which essentially means designating him as a friend. And yes, this is a "Predator" movie that acknowledges friendship, which, like everything in "Badlands," absolutely should not work but somehow does.

Screenwriters Brian Duffield (2020's underrated "Spontaneous") and Patrick Aison pepper "Badlands" with swaths of humor, never taking the enterprise overly seriously; there's a gag early on where Thia sets her language to a "universal translation" mode, a work-around to audiences hearing her in English while Dek hears her in his native language.

There's also a bit where Thia's legs, disembodied from the rest of her, become their own ass-kicking character; no "Predator" movie, and no other piece of big studio IP in memory, has felt the freedom to color so liberally outside of the lines of its own expectations as "Badlands" does.

In a dual role – she also plays her character's evil double, Tessa – Fanning is especially endearing, her humor and lightness a direct rebuke of the "Predator" series' often self-serious and macho tone. But it's not just empty, throwaway humor. Trachtenberg uses the story's playfulness to strengthen the audience's relationships to its characters, so by the time the big battles arrive, there are connections to the characters and stakes in the results.

"Badlands" still delivers the action that fans crave, but it finds new life in the "Predator" series precisely by not being so precious about itself or its lore. It's one of the year's biggest surprises: by lightening up, "Predator" once again feels vital.

MOVIE REVIEW

Even at full speed, *'The Running Man'* update runs out of gas

By MARK MESZAROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio) (TNS)

Decades later, unsettling ideas presented by horror great Stephen King in "The Running Man" continue to resonate.

Published in 1982 under the pen name Richard Bachman, "The Running Man" is set in a dystopian future in which one massive corporation controls virtually everything. That includes dangerous game shows offering citizens the rare chance to make significant money, the most popular, potentially profitable and dangerous of which is "The Running Man," a contest requiring survival that, well, no one survives.

First, in 1987, the book was adapted by director Paul Michael Glaser, with action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger starring as promising "Running Man" contestant Ben Richards. The campy movie, which introduces many changes from the book, received mixed reviews at the time of its release and now feels very dated.

Now comes a second adaptation, directed by Edgar Wright ("Shaun of the Dead," "Baby Driver") and starring Glen Powell as Ben Richards. While much more faithful to the novel, 2025's "The Running Man" – in theaters this week – borrows some of the over-the-top qualities from its predecessor and, despite cooking up food for thought and delivering plenty of tension, ultimately is a numbing affair.

It's just a lot, this "Running Man."

As it begins, Ben is out of work; blacklisted from any subsidiary of that all-powerful corporation, the Network, due to an incident at his construction job, he will have trouble landing any gig. His wife, Sheila (Jayme Lawson, "Sinners"), makes what she can waitressing at a seedy club, but it's not enough to pay for the medicine their sick baby daughter needs.

> **'The Running Man'**
>
> ★★
>
> **MPA rating:** R (for strong violence, some gore, and language)
>
> **Running time:** 2:13
>
> **How to watch:** In theaters

"Don't worry," Ben says as he holds the young, feverish girl, as they pass a promotion for "The Running Man." "Daddy isn't THAT crazy."

But, of course, he is. After promising Sheila he will compete only in one of the Network's other shows, even though the payouts aren't nearly as good, the angry but highly capable Ben is enticed to take part in "The Running Man" by manipulative producer extraordinaire Dan Killian (Josh Brolin, "Weapons").

Soon, after a brief head start, Ben must be on the lookout for Network-employed Hunters, including the fearsome Evan McCone (Lee Pace, "Foundation"), but also for any viewers interested in reward money for turning him in – or for taking him out themselves. The longer he stays alive – and places required daily video recordings into Network dropboxes – the more money will be sent to his family. If he can beat the incredible odds for 30 days, he'll be $1 billion richer.

Ross Ferguson / Paramount Pictures / TNS

Glen Powell stars in "The Running Man."

Ben finds help along the way from sympathetic folks played by William H. Macy ("Shameless"), Daniel Ezra ("All American") and Michael Cera, star of Wright's largely beloved 2010 action comedy romance, "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World." None of these characters is all that interesting, save for Cera's colorful underground revolutionary, Elton Parrakis, but, like the movie overall, he's the result of too many ideas being crammed into one box.

Similarly uninteresting are Brolin's Killian – he's merely another version of countless movie villains over the years – and Colman Domingo's Bobby "Bobby T" Thompson, the charismatic host of "The Running Man." (That's not a knock on "Fear the Walking Dead" and "Sing Sing" standout Domingo, who puts his back into the role.)

In retrospect, we like that the first "Running Man" combined Killian and Bobby T into one character – played with gusto by "Family Feud" host Richard Dawson.

The 1987 movie also made something more out of the female character who becomes embroiled in Ben's chase. In this case, it's Emilia Jones' Amelia Williams, who eventually becomes Ben's hostage-turned-ally. This happens too late in the proceedings for us to buy the bond between the characters – especially disappointing given how the strong performances Jones gives in the Academy Award-winning 2021 film "CODA" and this year's excellent HBO drama series "Task."

Most importantly, Powell is solid as the story's protagonist, but the star of crowd-pleasers such as "Anyone But You" and "Twisters" is a bit too naturally charming for you to completely buy Ben's anger, as warranted as it may be. On the other hand, the viewers of the game show must fall in love with him and root for him for the story to work, and Powell is more than engaging enough.

Working again with his "Pilgrim" co-writer, Michael Bacall ("21 Jump Street"), Wright is more concerned with blending social commentary with fast-paced action, two things "The Running Man" possesses in abundance.

So, yes, the film invites reflection on topics including class, the government, the power of media manipulation and where society is now, as well as where it's headed, and it leads to nail-biting through numerous well-executed, frenetically edited action sequences as Ben cheats death again and again. Also, you'll likely appreciate one obvious but fun nod to the first movie.

Still, watching it left us increasingly worn out by its excesses. Not counting the credits, the movie is just over two hours long, but it feels longer – even as its relentless pace ensures it never drags.

Certainly somewhat prescient, King's novel is set in 2025, but, its production notes, Wright chalks up this cinematic update's release coming this year as "a coincidence." Also perhaps coincidentally, Wright's "The Running Man" races into theaters a few months after "The Long Walk," another adaptation of a novel by King published under the name Richard Bachman and set in a dystopian future.

Value may be found in revisiting the dark futures King envisioned those many years ago, but, with "The Running Man" at least, you may be better off going back to the book.

Destin Conrad didn't overthink his first jazz project – that's exactly why it works

By KAILYN BROWN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — Destin Conrad didn't expect to release a jazz project so early in his career – let alone just a few months after dropping his debut album, "Love on Digital."

The 25-year-old singer-songwriter, who first made millions of people laugh on Vine when he was a preteen, entered the music industry as a fresh-faced R&B artist, following in the footsteps of the artists he grew up listening to such as Brandy, Musiq Soulchild and Usher. His first official EP "Colorway" (2021) and the slew of bite-size projects that followed were melodic and honest meditations on love, lust, queer identity and simply having a good time.

But during the summer, Conrad found himself gravitating to jazz, the genre he was introduced to in high school when he was enrolled in jazz choir. He was inspired by all of the greats and contemporary work by artists like Vanisha Gould, and decided that it was time for a slight departure in his own sound.

"I feel like it's always kind of been in me," Conrad says over Zoom during an off day from his second headlining tour in support of "Love on Digital." "It's always been a tool that I never really got to exercise that I knew I really wanted to."

After a two-week whirlwind in L.A. filled with studio sessions with some of his bucket list collaborators like Gould, trumpeter Keyon Harrold and beloved L.A. saxophonist Terrace Martin, Conrad unveiled "Whimsy," an 11-track alternative jazz detour. Rich with songwriting tinged with sensual winks, live instrumentation (piano, horn section and drums) and a spoken word interlude by Bay Davis (that is reminiscent of Meshell Ndegeocello), "Whimsy" is a masterclass in following your own intuition and creating freely – a testament to his Cancer sun.

"I think it's some of my best work actually," Conrad says, adding that it was the most fun to make, which is evident on tracks like "Whip," a cheeky double entendre about trading places in the bedroom and "A Lonely Detective," which explores the life of a man living a double life. "Things that I've spent more time on, I don't feel as connected to, but I really love "Whimsy."

Conrad phoned in the day before Grammy nominations were announced to talk about why he was nervous to release "Whimsy," why he thinks jazz deserves more attention and what he's still learning about being an artist in the digital age. Little did he know that by the next morning, he'd receive his first solo Grammy nod for progressive R&B album.

Q: Now that your debut album, "Love on Digital," has been in the world for a few months and you've experienced fans singing it back to you at shows, how does it feel to look back on the journey of releasing it?

A: It's been amazing. I think it's made me look forward to putting more music out. I feel like this tour taught me a lot. While making this album, I had touring in the back of my mind, so I'm really excited that it's being received well. Also, it's kind of wild that I put out another project a [few] months later but I'm glad I have such cool fans that receive me in a good way.

Q: Speaking of that, you turned around and released "Whimsy" in August. Can you talk about how that all came together and how your single "Wash U Away" inspired it?

A: I made the majority of it in a two-week span. "Wash U Away" and "Whip" I had, but they weren't jazz songs. So I had "Wash U Away" in the tuck for years – I think I made it in like 2021 – but we had it replayed by actual musicians because before, it was just a very bare beat. Then the rest of it I made within those two weeks. I also had "The W" with James Fauntleroy and Joyce Wrice already, but same thing – it wasn't a jazz song. I knew I wanted to make a jazz album. I didn't know I was going to do it so soon after my debut album, but I was kind of on a wild one and was like "Why not?" But I'm really glad I did it because I feel like my fans really like that album and I really like that album as well. I think it's some of my best work actually. Things that I spent more time on, I don't feel as connected to but it's something that I'm really proud of.

David Livingston / Getty Images / TNS

Destin Conrad attends the 2024 Warner Music Group Pre-Grammy Party at Citizen News Hollywood on Feb. 1 in Los Angeles.

Q: Take me back to those two weeks in L.A. when you starting working on this project. Was it summer time?

A: It was summertime, yeah. I live in Brooklyn now, so I was like "I'm going to fly to L.A. and stay there for two weeks to knock this project out." I told my managers, "Get me in with everybody. Here's my list of people I want to work with. Let's figure it out." We flew out Vanisha Gould, who's one of my favorite jazz musicians. I was so ecstatic that she was down. She's such a jazz head. She was kind of like "What the f--- am I doing? Are they going to kidnap me? I'm just flying out here to work with this random ass R&B singer." But I'm so glad she came and we low-key became besties. Same with Terrace Martin. I've been a fan forever. He's the G.O.A.T. James [Fauntleroy]. All these people who I was very adamant about working with. And eventually I want to do another jazz [project]. Maybe a "Whimsy 2" and just keep that world alive because I feel like jazz is such a special genre that gets overlooked and it's something that I really feel passionate about. Especially because I was in jazz choir in high school and it kind of taught me more about soul music and the origins and how there's so many synchronicities within other genres like gospel, and how R&B and all of them just tie into each other. I think it's just really cool.

Q: What was going on in your world when you started making "Whimsy?" Were you listening to a lot of jazz at the time?

A: Yeah, I was listening to a lot of jazz music. I was listening to a lot of Vanisha Gould and I was like, "I need to do this jazz album." I thought I was just going to start it and be like "I'm not done." But I was like "No, I'm done. This is it. This is what I have to say." But yeah, I always listen to jazz. As I said, I was in jazz choir in high school. My jazz instructor Mr. O put me onto hella jazz. He showed me Frank Sinatra and all these jazz standards. I have videos that I'll eventually show the world of me performing at my jazz Christmas show. I feel like it's always been within me. It's always been a tool that I never really got to exercise but I knew I really wanted to. But like I said, I didn't know I'd make it in two weeks and that it'd be such a quick thing. It was so fun to make. It's probably one of the most fun projects I've made.

Q: You can definitely hear how much fun you were having on tracks like "Boredom" and "Lonely Detective." I feel like jazz was once viewed as a genre that older people listened to, but that's been changing within the last few years. It feels like it's becoming more popular with younger audiences. What do you think about this?

A: Personally, I don't think it's becoming more popular. I would love to be part of some sort of push of making it more of a thing and I feel like a lot of my fans are younger. I'd like to say in my head that I'm helping push the genre forward. It's just not super prominent. There's not a lot of new jazz artists. If you look at the jazz charts, a lot of what's still charting is like Frank Sinatra [and] Miles Davis. Laufey is one of the newer faces of jazz that I feel like is pushing it aside from like Robert Glasper. But I don't know. I feel like a lot of the jazz even that I listen to is the older stuff. There's a very select few of newer jazz artists that I'm like "Yes." Like Vanisha Gould, a perfect example. I'm obsessed with her. I think she's one of the most talented musicians that I know, period.

Q: How did you feel about dropping "Whimsy"? Were you nervous about how people would receive it?

A: Umm I thought about it [but] what I really thought about were the jazz heads. I thought the real, super crazy into jazz people were gonna be like, "This s--- ain't f------ jazz" because I do consider it an alternative jazz album. I remember talking to Terrace [Martin] about that because he's a jazz head and he's also older than me and he's been in it for longer. I was telling him [that] I feel like people are going to have s--- to say about it because it's not traditional and I'm not a trained musician. I don't know how to read music. I just go with my [gut], and he was like, "That's why it's so fire. That's what makes people feel it." He was like, "I can tell that you're young and when I listen to this, I hear a 25-year-old," and I'm like, "Tight."

Q: You've essentially grown up online and in the public eye. How has that evolution shaped the way you see yourself as an artist, and what have you learned about navigating visibility over the years?"

A: I feel like it's an advantage. I always talk about that especially with my artist homies. I was an internet baby so I kind of have just a slight advantage because I knew really early how it worked. I feel like I'm still learning how to promote my music because I know how to get on the internet and be an idiot all day. I can do that literally in my sleep, but being an idiot who knows how to promote his music is different. [laughs] So yeah, I'm still learning that. I used to think it harmed me because I was so scared that people wouldn't take my music seriously. But no, I use it to my advantage for sure.

Q: We're at a time in music where it's common for artists to be open and proud about their identity and sexuality without feeling like they need to use coded language. I think of artists like Frank Ocean, Steve Lacy and Durand Bernarr. Can you talk about why talking about your queerness is important to you?

A: I feel like I'm a pretty honest person in general. I try not to lie and I feel like all I can do really is just keep it a bean. Most of the time, I try to write about my personal experiences and I deal with men, so that's just my truth [laughs]. I do also write from other perspectives like things that my friends or my homegirls tell me. I don't always write from my point of view, but when I do, it's about a man and that's all I can really do.

BOOKS

HOW BRUCE LEE TRANSFORMED from martial arts star to enduring icon

By PETER LARSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

The first step was easy.

A book editor, impressed by Jeff Chang's acclaimed 2005 cultural history of hip-hop, "Can't Stop Won't Stop," asked if he'd consider writing a book on Bruce Lee, the martial arts icon and movie star.

The next 99 steps? Well, that's something altogether different.

The editor who'd pitched the biography left the publishing industry. Chang had two books already under contract to finish. More editors came and went. Another book cut to the front of the line. A fourth editor dropped the book.

In 2021, nearly 15 years after Chang originally agreed to do the Lee project, the book went out to bid again – and quickly sold again – but Chang no longer knew what he wanted to do with it.

"You know, when you do a celebrity bio there's a certain kind of format," he says on a recent afternoon in a downtown Los Angeles bookstore, where outside at one point gunshots and police sirens interrupted the calm inside. "The mission is to dig up all the dirt you can. The essential narrative is, 'This person wasn't an angel.'

"That wasn't what I was interested in."

By then, it was the height of the pandemic and Chang, who lives in Oakland, was working long days at a racial justice institute as violence targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders skyrocketed in the Bay Area and around the world.

"At the same time, the image of Bruce started appearing on the walls in Oakland Chinatown, San Francisco Chinatown, here in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York City," says Chang, whose heritage is Chinese and native Hawaiian.

"I already had been pondering the question of why it is that Bruce Lee is a hero to people all around the world who feel like they've been stepped on," he says. "So when he starts appearing on walls, I was like, 'Oh, there's a bigger story here, and he's representing something new now to a new generation of Asian Americans."

"Water Mirror Echo: Bruce Lee and the Making of Asian America" is freshly arrived in bookstores, and while it contains the story of Lee's life from his birth in San Francisco in 1940 to his death at 32 in 1973, it is a biography wrapped inside a cultural history, the story of both Lee and the multitudes who in him saw pieces of their own stories..

A symbol of strength

Lee remains the epitome of cool, and Chang says the martial arts star's door-opening cachet made it easier for young Asian Americans to enter the world of hip-hop. "The image we made of Bruce was Bruce with dark glasses getting ready to rock two turntables," he says.

"For this generation, it was Bruce as an image of strength, of pride, or unity," Chang continues. "And also this desire for solidarity. Like, we need to stick together, but also we need folks to be able to see us."

Bruce Lee wasn't just a 2-dimensional mural on a brick wall or a poster in a bedroom, Chang realized. In many ways, he lived on.

"The rise of Bruce and the rise of Asian America, they almost mirror each other," he says. "While Bruce is not an activist, he reflects a lot of the ambitions and desires of that particular generation that names themselves 'Asian Americans' for the first time.

"I thought, 'Ah, that's the story.' The whole book changed to that particular point."

Hero to all

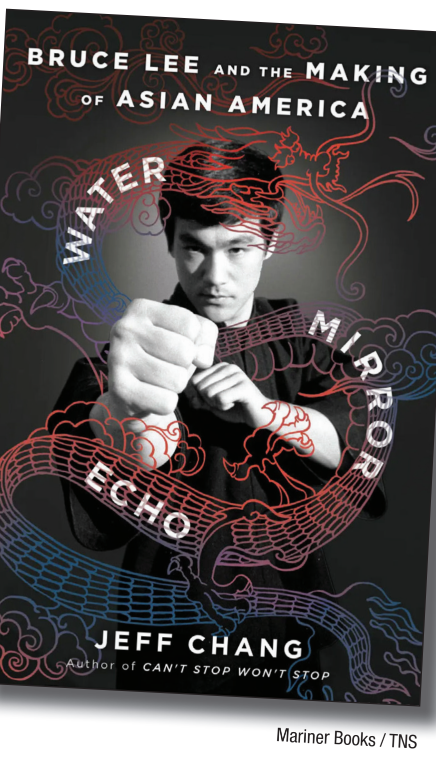
As a boy growing up in Honolulu in the '70s and '80s, Chang says Lee was ever-present.

"Just like my kids never knew a time before hip-hop, Bruce was almost always there for us," he says. "So on the playground, as soon as we were able to make those noises and jump around, that's what we're doing.

"We're also the generation that discovered Bruce not in the movie theaters, but on TV," Chang says. "It was the kind of thing where they're having Saturday or Sunday afternoon kung fu movies on TV. I feel like they probably ran a cycle of the Bruce Lee movies at least once a year."

When Lee's son Brandon Lee seemed poised to take up his father's mantle, Chang and his friends followed his rise as a young martial artist and action movie star.

"We come of age; we're looking for heroes," he says. But when Brandon Lee dies in an accident in 1993 while shooting "The Crow," an eerie parallel to his father's death during the production of "Enter the Dragon," the younger hero soon fades.



Mariner Books / TNS

"That's really the moment at which Bruce comes back to be in our consciousness," Chang says. "Because Brandon would have been our hero, probably.

"'The Crow' was his 'Enter the Dragon,' in a way," he says of those films' star-making potential. "He was on his way."

The same year, Chang notes, was also the year the hip-hop collective Wu-Tang Clan, a group of young rappers raised on Bruce Lee and other kung fu movies, released its debut album, "Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)."

Crossing cultures

How did the Wu-Tang Clan, and other rappers and hip-hop groups, come to love Bruce Lee and martial arts movies? The answer, Chang says, lies in the success of director Melvin Van Peebles' indie movie, "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song," one of the first big Blaxploitation movies.

As the '70s started, Hollywood was flailing and failing to figure out how to make movies for the youth audience. When Van Peebles' movie was an inexpensive hit, the studios took notice. Soon, such films as "Shaft" and "Superfly" filled the screens in inner city cinemas, he says.

When Lee's Hong Kong martial arts movies showed similar appeal, those same theaters got them, too.

"These audiences might be going in to see a Blaxploitation movie and they're going, 'Hey, what's this kung fu stuff?'" Chang says. "They become enamored of the mythology because in so many ways it's actually a parallel history.

"I uncover in the book the ways in which they really, literally, are like parallel histories. The links between Hong Kong and the Bronx, and the way that the youth culture becomes a popular culture.

"I'm drawn to these stories where these kids from nowhere, who are abandoned and forgotten, come in and their creativity creates these irresistible cultures that then change the whole world.

"That they should do that across generations, across cultures and around the world, it's just an amazing story," Chang says.

Digging deep

Research for "Water Mirror Echo" began even before Chang had mapped out the narrative of the book. Lee's life provided plenty of breadcrumbs to follow.

Born in San Francisco, his family moved home to Hong Kong when he was an infant. As a boy, he was a child star in Hong Kong cinema. In 1959, his parents sent him to San Francisco and then Seattle to finish his high school education and study at the University of Washington.

By the mid-'60s, Lee was back in California. At a Long Beach karate tournament, he impressed onlookers, including celebrity hairstylist Jay Sebring, who later mentioned Lee's talent to TV director William Dozier. In time, that led to Lee being cast as Kato in the TV series "Green Hornet."

By the late '60s, Lee had grown frustrated with Hollywood, opening his own martial arts studio in Los Angeles Chinatown. He developed his own style, which he named Jeet Kune Do, which mixed various martial artis and fighting techniques into one.

Disappointed after his pitch for a kung fu TV series was rejected, Lee returned to Hong Kong, where he embarked on a short run of influential martial arts movies that included "The Big Boss," "Fist of Fury," and "The Way of the Dragon." He recaptured the interest and money of Hollywood studios for his final few projects.

From Lee's return to the United States in 1959 to his death in Hong Kong in 1973, his life and career were well-documented in journals and letters. Magazines covered his career at the Jeet Kune Do studio and his personal library. Martial arts magazines wrote about him often after he opened his studio in Los Angeles, many of them with interview transcripts that Chang mined for contemporaneous commentary.

The Wing Luke Museum in Seattle has most of Lee's library of books, which Chang mined for the notes in the margins and passages he'd underlined with a ruler and a red or blue pen.

Notes in Chinese, for which Chang worked with an interpreter, "gave a good sense of what his inner life was like," he says. "Because these were notes he'd written just to himself, or to his family in letters that may have never been sent during periods in which he was feeling most vulnerable."

Old friends and memories

Interviews with old friends and family members, including Lee's widow Linda Lee Cadwell and daughter Shannon Lee, also revealed lesser-known truths about the man behind the image.

"You come in from the outside and you're like, 'Bruce is invulnerable, like, he must have always had this thing in him," Chang says. "But it was, for me, really moving, poignant, and something I wanted to lean into to find out about all his foibles and vulnerabilities.

"To talk to people who knew him, say in Seattle, and ask them what he was like when he got excited. They'd be like, 'Sometimes he had so much he wanted to say and he couldn't express it, so he would just shake."

A key early interview arrived with Amy Sanbo, a fellow student at the University of Washington, and Lee's first big love in the United States.

"Bruce is just completely head over heels for her, but she didn't really think that he was all that," Chang says of Sanbo's first impression. "She thought he was kind of immature.

"Bruce is a kid, not six months off the boat," he says. "To talk to his University of Washington fellow students, who are like, 'This guy was annoying.' He came on the one hand, with all this confidence, and on the other hand, with all this awkwardness.

"To hear people say, 'You're strange,' it's pretty funny, and it's also not a picture of Bruce that I had read in other biographies."

From Lee to here

Fifty years after the death of the first Asian superstar, how have things changed for Asian American figures in pop culture? Chang, who concludes the book with a chapter on just this, has thought about it a lot.

Before Lee, actress Anna May Wong might have been the biggest Chinese-American star in Hollywood. Yet she was limited to stereotypical roles and excluded from the chance to play a Chinese character in the 1937 adaptation of Pearl S. Buck's "The Good Earth." Instead, the German-born Luise Rainer got the part and won an Oscar for playing an Asian.

Lee fought to break free of the stereotypical roles offered to Asian actors, but as Kato, he was still a servant, cook and driver for the titular Green Hornet.

He fought, and won, the right to make "Enter the Dragon" his way, Chang says, but he died before that film was released.

"Then it takes another generation before to get to 'Dragon' [a Bruce Lee biopic], to get to Brandon Lee, to get to 'All-American Girl' [Margaret Cho's sitcom], to get to 'The Joy Luck Club,'" Chang says. "It takes another generation almost for us to get to 'Crazy Rich Asians,' 'Fresh Off the Boat,'

"The crowning thing of this is 'Everything Everywhere All at Once,'" Chang says of the 2022 film, which won seven Academy Awards, including best picture, best actress and best supporting actor and actress.

"It's natural to say that you have this multi-racial [entertainment] like we see all day, every day right now," Chang says. "It's a big deal to see that on the screen.

"What history tells us is that we have to go back into hibernation and wait another generation for something to happen before we can do that," he says. "I hope not, but that's sort of the long shadow of Bruce.

"There's a lot of movement forward in the last five years, and then the tide may be going out now," Chang says. "I don't want to think that. We're all still here, and we're all making work.

"But who knows? It's part of a larger story of America right now that's still being written."

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Nov. 1, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan © 2025 Circana.

Hardcover fiction

1. Bonds of Hercules (deluxe ed.). Jasmine Mas. Canary Street
2. The Hobby Wolf. Louise Penny. Minotaur
3. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
4. The Secret of Secrets. Dan Brown. Doubleday
5. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
6. Gone Before Goodbye. Witherspoon/Coben. Grand Central
7. The Proving Ground. Michael Connelly. Little, Brown
8. Remain. Sparks/Shyamalan. Random House
9. Always Remember. Charlie Mackesy. Penguin Life
10. Twice. Mitch Albom. Harper

Hardcover nonfiction

1. The Pioneer Woman Cooks: The Essential Recipes. Ree Drummond. Morrow
2. Nobody's Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
3. The Let Them Theory. Mel Robbins. Hay House
4. Read Your Mind. Oz Pearlman. Viking
5. How to Test Negative for Stupid. John Kennedy. Broadside
6. That's a Great Question, I'd Love to Tell You. Elyse Myers. Morrow
7. To Rescue the American Spirit. Bret Baier. Mariner
8. 1929. Andrew Ross Sorkin. Viking
9. The Uncool. Cameron Crowe. Avid Reader
10. The Promise of Heaven. David Jeremiah. Thomas Nelson

Trade paperback

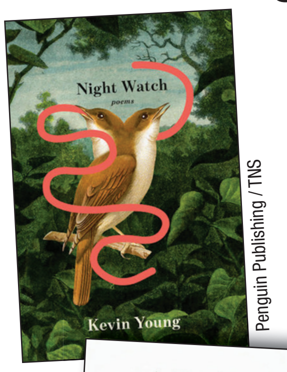
1. The Defender (deluxe ed.). Ana Huang. Bloom
2. Mate. Ali Hazelwood. Berkley
3. Good Spirits. B.K. Borison. Avon
4. Merry Christmas, You Filthy Animal. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
5. Breathe with Me. Becka Mack. Slowburn
6. The Summer Hikaru Died, Vol. 6. Mokumokuren. Yen
7. The Wrath of the Fallen. Amber V. Nicole. Kensington
8. The God of the Woods. Liz Moore. Riverhead
9. Mile High. Liz Tomforde. Amara
10. The Surrogate Mother. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

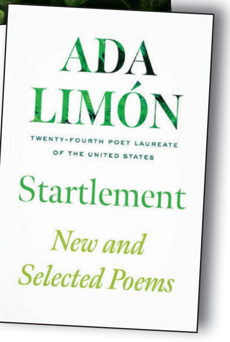
REVIEW

'Brilliance' from poets Ada Limón, Kevin Young

By VIKAS TURAKHIA
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)



Penguin Publishing / TNS



Milkweed Editions / TNS

Two new collections, "Night Watch" by Kevin Young and "Startlement: New and Selected Poems" by Ada Limón, showcase strikingly different voices in contemporary poetry.

Young, poetry editor for the New Yorker and former director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, always surprises. His tone shifts from playful riffs in one collection ("Jelly Roll") to elegiac reflection in another ("Book of Hours"). He steeps the formally structured poems of "Night Watch" in history.

In "The Two-Headed Nightingale" he gives voice to Millie and Christine McKoy, conjoined twins born enslaved in 1851 and displayed by showmen, including P.T. Barnum. As they are taken town to town, invasive doctors, "self-appointed / & -taught," want "to peer under – / to peek." The sisters "are specimen / A woman only in word."

"Darkling," the book's hallucinatory main section, reimagines the hell, purgatory and paradise of Dante's "Divine Comedy" through a Black American lens. Young conjures tragedies with the image of blood "seeping into the street," and while Donald Trump isn't named, the devil here, with thin orange skin and tongues "like a red tail or necktie," is a "night / manager for this Hotel / of Hell."

Some stanzas of "Darkling" are too enigmatic, spurring in me what poet Billy Collins disparages as a student's need to "tie the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it." Still, even when I lose the narrative in Young's incantatory fog, the journey resonates as the poem moves out of Hell toward the "belief in something / unseen gathering-- / Spring in the bare / branches of the tree."

With "Startlement," Limón demonstrates her brilliance, gathering 21 new poems and 102 from her previous books, all of which precisely observe life with emotional clarity. To read her is to want to keep quoting lines until people surrender and pick up her books.

Limón's older work reaps epiphanies from memory ("The Raincoat") and the natural world ("Instructions On Not Giving Up"), and recent poems ("Hell or High Water") continue that arc. Other new pieces go further as Limón grapples with staying connected to a changing, overwhelming universe.

In "The Endlessness," the former poet laureate of the U.S. writes about not seeing "the lines of things" as a child, instead perceiving "memory, what had been / done to the object before it was placed on / the coffee table or the nightstand."

"In The End, Everything Gives" plays with the contradictory meanings of "giving." The world breaks as it "gives way, the shorelines, the house decaying / and becoming shrub and moss and haunt." But giving is also "the palm reaching out," something "you could hold and in turn it could hold you back."

"While Everything Else Was Falling Apart" finds delight and hope in such a gesture as a man learns "from a vendor how to pronounce / churro. High in the sticky clouds of time, he kept /repeating churro while eating a churro."

Both poets succeed in assuring that their work remains with readers. Young forces us to reflect on lives already lived and our role in the legacies we leave as a society, while much of Limón's work illuminates the value of an individual life that might otherwise feel minuscule, as well as the moments that reveal "how the Earth was made."

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

2025 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet rules the roads

By MARC D. GRASSO
Boston Herald (TNS)

As Porsche enters Grasso's Garage for the last time in 2025, we recognize a symbol of historical excellence: The 911 Carrera. Our GTS Cabriolet week-long tester was outstanding in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York as the windy and mountainous terrain were just the fit for a nice three-day top-down weekend cruise. Our 911 GTS Carrera Cabriolet's white exterior, black interior and red convertible top paired nicely with the high-gloss black brake calipers.

Priced at $175K base, 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet is powered by a 3.6-liter T-hybrid Boxer six-cylinder engine that produces 532 horsepower and 449 pound-feet of torque. It has no problem getting up and going and sounding great while doing so. It has four drive modes and goes from zero to 60 mph in 3 seconds, making for an 11-second quarter-mile time.

Our 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet came with an array of options, including an extended range fuel tank, front axle lift system, 18-way adaptive and ventilated sports seats with memory package and the Premium package including an ionizer, storage net, lane change assist and surround view with active parking support. A standard Porsche warranty of four years/50,000 miles and 24-hour roadside assistance was also noted. The 911 GTS Cabriolet delivers a great exterior aesthetic, design and that classic 911 styling that consumers continue to drool over.

As the 911 stands strong in the Porsche fleet, the Carrera GTS is easily their best looking, most enjoyable sports car. And Porsche's ever-evolving list of upgrades confirm no two Porsches are ever the same.

Marc Grasso / Boston Herald / TNS

2025 Porsche 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet

MSRP: $178,200

MPG: 17 city / 23 highway / 20.1 as tested

As Tested: $194,795

No window, no problem – chasing Tesla in the sleek Polestar 4

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

On two-lane Route 117 in Quebec, I jumped into the left lane, nailed the throttle in my 544-horsepower, 2026 Polestar 4 and – ZOT! – was past the truck in front of me in the blink of an eye. I glanced in the rear camera mirror, pulled back into the right lane, and gave the truck a wave.

Except the Polestar 4 has no rear window, and the trucker never saw my gesture. Haw.

Polestar's latest compact SUV is quick, cool and – as its clever rear design implies – innovative; just like Tesla models that pioneered the EV segment over the last dozen years. With Tesla in mind, Volvo (and its Chinese owners) spun off its Polestar performance badge in 2017 as a full-line electric vehicle brand. Where Volvo has developed EVs with its safety and design north stars, Polestar has leaned into speed and innovation.

The fourth – and most important model to date in Polestar's young journey – the 4 is a Scandinavian Tesla Model Y. Call it Polesla.

Like the camera mirror in Tesla's Cybertruck, the 4's rearview unit is necessitated by its radical rear roof design. Determined to make the compact SUV look like a racy sports coupe (while maintaining utilitarian rear seat and cargo space), the Polestar 4 does without a rear window, confident that the advance of digital mirrors and blind-spot assist would cover the void.

It works, though old habits (like my trucker wave) will die hard.

It's a reminder that digital technology is changing every tool in the automobile. Cadillac innovated the camera mirror last decade. At the Detroit Grand Prix in 2018, I asked race car driver Jorden Taylor what his 600-horsepower, $730,000 winged Cadillac DPi.V.R cyborg shared with a production Cadillac.

"Two things," said the affable race pilot. "The V-8 engine block and the camera mirror. You can't see out of these mid-engine race cars, and the camera mirror allows me an unobstructed view out back so I can see my competitors and slower traffic around me. I love it."

Now it's standard in the $57,400 Polestar 4. It will not be to everyone's liking in a ferociously competitive premium class that includes Model Y, Cadillac Optiq, Mustang Mach-E, Genesis GV70, BMW iX3 and Lexus RZ. All with rear windows.

What won't be polarizing is the Polestar's rear head and legroom. At a charging station (more on that later), I hopped into the back seat, where the standard panoramic roof arched backward above me. It easily cleared my 6'5" head before plunging into the rear tailgate, much further rearward than other roofs in the segment. The result is plenty of light for the rear passenger. Sun too strong? Opt for the cool two-mode roof that will turn opaque at a touch of a button.

I could also move the rear seat back, comfortably stretching my legs to sit behind myself. Still, competitors like Tesla and Optiq offer more room.

Like its peer internal combustion engine segment, compact EV SUVs are where the sales are, and brands have brought their A game.

The Model Y is so good it was the second best selling non-pickup in the market last year after the gas-powered mainstream Toyota RAV4 compact SUV. The Polestar follows the formula with distinctive styling, a simple interior and raw speed.

South Korea-made and Chinese-owned (Geely), the 4 is the third mass production model in the Polestar lineup, following the (now withdrawn) 2 hatchback and 3 midsize SUV. The 4 (Polestar numbers its vehicles in order of rollout) has matured with its own design cues.

Gone are the Volvo-like Thor's Hammer headlights in the 2 and 3, replaced by dual-blade headlights, grille-less sports car fascia and horizontal tail lamps. The separation from Volvo is important, even as Polestar stays true to spare Scandinavian style prized by everyone from Ikea furniture to Orrefors glass shoppers.

The 4's exterior is cleaner than the busier lines of the 2 and 3. With its wide stance, coupe roofline and deeply-scalloped rocker panels, the SUV gives off a sporty, athletic vibe.

The simplicity continues inside. With key in pocket, the 4 recognized me as I approached, extending the flush door handles like a handshake. When I settled into the comfortable high-backed seats, the Polestar automatically turned on. No need to touch the brake pedal, push a button, insert a key. Slick.

As was the spare interior anchored by a 15.4-inch horizontal screen. No buttons cluttered the dash or doors. Tesla-like, I adjusted my side mirrors, steering wheel and air vents in the screen. Operated by Google Built-in (like General Motors EVs), other functions can be controlled by voice command.

Hey, Google, set driver temperature to 70 degrees.

Done.

Hey, Google, navigate to Mont-Tremblant, Quebec.

Done.

Hey, Google, make the roof opaque.

Done.

Hey, Google, tell me a joke.

"How do trees access the Internet? They log in."

I like a car with personality, and the 4 has it in droves. Tesla has fart cushions, tracks Mars, and names its drive modes (like Plaid) after the movie "Spaceballs." Polestar tells jokes, tracks the solar system and weaves its interior fabrics like Swedish textiles.

It tracks Tesla on charging, too, with NACS (North American Charging Standard) connector so you can navigate to – and fill up at – Tesla's ubiquitous Supercharger network.

The 4 trails the segment's best EVs, the Model Y and Optiq, in two respects.

First, while my $64,300 all-wheel-drive tester boasts eye-popping acceleration numbers on par with a Model Y Performance, the Polestar is a significant 800 pounds porkier and a big financial ask (especially with the $7,500 federal welfare gone) for a new luxury badge.

Second, while the equally luxurious Optiq is also porky, the Cadillac and the Tesla offer superior hands-free driving systems. Navigate from, say, Montreal to Detroit, and the Tesla (and Caddy) will take you there hands-free on four lanes. Not the 4, which only sports adaptive cruise control.

Still, it's great to see a new badge mature, and the Polestar 4 is a welcome addition to the U.S. market. Just remember to roll down your window if you want to wave at the trucker you just blew by.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Polestar 4
★★★

Vehicle type: All-wheel-drive, five-passenger compact SUV

Price: Base $57,400, including $1,400 destination charge ($64,300 Dual Motor as tested)

Powerplant: Lithium-ion battery pack mated to single/dual electric motors

Power: 272 horsepower, 253 pound-feet torque (single rear motor); 544 horsepower, 506 pound-feet torque (dual front and rear motors)

Transmission: Single-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 3.7 seconds (mfr.); top speed, 124 mph

Weight: 5,192 pounds (as tested)

Range: 310 miles (single motor), 280 miles (dual front and rear motors)

Report card

Highs: Cool design; electric performance

Lows: Polarizing design; lacks full self-drive

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

TECHNOLOGY

We all need portable power on the go, and that's what you get with INIU's new Pocket Rocket P50. The fast-charging portable power bank has 10,000mAh of power packed inside, producing up to 45 watts of output.
INIU / TNS

GADGETS

Air duster makes itself invaluable

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

The **Wolfbox MF100 Air Duster** is one of those gadgets you don't think you need – until you try it, and suddenly you wonder how you lived without it.

The MF100 Air Duster is an endless amount of compressed air packed into a handheld device. There are three adjustable speeds (slow, medium, high) to suit specific needs, ranging from light dust removal to heavy-duty chores, with speeds up to 185 mph.

Knowing all this, you might wonder how you would use an air duster. First and foremost in my world, having a clean car is a priority. After the wash itself, an air compressor, which many car washes have, is the best accessory for cleaning all the nooks and crannies of a car's interior.

The MF100 Air Duster ($79.99/Amazon) was put to task for my car cleaning and won me over in seconds. On the interior, it cleans hard-to-get-to areas, like vents, dashboard corners, between seats, molding seams and similar places. For the exterior, water is often left in moldings, seams, edges of windows, side mirrors, etc., which were no match for the MF100.

If car washing isn't crucial to you, how about blowing dust and crumbs off your keyboard or other hard-to-get-to areas of your household? That's the part I was referring to, where you think you don't need it until you have it. Finding uses is endless, allowing one to conquer hard-to-reach areas needing cleaning easily.

It weighs just 0.66 pounds and has two button controls, so it's compact, and easy to use and store. It's powered by an internal USB-C 6,000 mAh rechargeable battery, which is suitable for up to 100 minutes of use, depending on the speed that is used. A full charge will take 2.5 hours.

Five nozzles, two brushes, a charging cable and a lanyard are included to adjust for cleaning most any task. In addition to cleaning dusty areas, the MR100 can be used to fill air mattresses or pool floats in less than a minute. Blow leaves off your patio, clean an AC vent, or use a low setting to help a campfire get going.

It is also good for the environment when you consider how many uses it provides over its lifetime compared to disposable canned air, which gets a fraction of the uses before being tossed into the trash.

The MF200 Air Duster ($99.99/Amazon) has many of the same features but also includes a swappable 6,000 mAh rechargeable battery to extend the run time. Both models come with a 24-month warranty and 24/7 customer service. Extra batteries are $34.99 each.

https://wolfbox.com/collections/best-air-duster

We all need portable power on the go, and that's what you get with INIU's new **Pocket Rocket P50**. The fast-charging portable power bank has 10,000mAh of power packed inside, producing up to 45 watts of output.

Measuring just 3.3 by 2.0 by 1.0 inches/5.6 ounces, it's hard to dispute INIU's claim that it is the world's smallest power bank with this much power. It has an integrated USB-C lanyard cable for charging and recharging. The P50 can simultaneously charge three devices with a pair of USB-C ports and a single USB-A.

The INIU specifications state that it can bring a smartphone with a low battery to about 73 percent in 25 minutes. Or take a MacBook Air up to 42 percent in the same amount of time. They list the battery to deliver roughly two full charges to an iPhone 16, 1.5 charges to a Samsung S24, or 1.5 charges to an iPad mini.

One of the USB-C ports works as an input to charge the Rocket P50 itself. It's available in a variety of colors for $32.99

https://iniushop.com/products/new-colorful-iniu-carry-p50-e1-power-bank-45w-smallest-10000mah

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

The INIU specifications state that it can bring a smartphone with a low battery to about 73 percent in 25 minutes.
INIU / TNS

The MF100 Air Duster is an endless amount of compressed air packed into a handheld device. There are three adjustable speeds (slow, medium, high) to suit specific needs, ranging from light dust removal to heavy-duty chores, with speeds up to 185 mph.
Wolfbox / TNS

What should you do if you lose your phone?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I usually write about things that happen to others, but this week it was my turn to do something worth sharing.

I left my iPhone in the cart at the grocery store, and I didn't realize it until I drove home.

I got that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

My wife and I share locations with each other, so I asked her to check my phone's location, and sure enough, it was back at the store.

My first thought was to call the store and ask them to be on the lookout for it. I phoned the store and the phone just rang for about two minutes with no answer (it was after 9 p.m.).

I got frustrated and decided to drive the 10 minutes back to the store.

At home, my wife was able to contact the store and they told her the phone had been found and turned in at the store's office.

Crisis averted.

So, what should you do if you lose your phone and don't get it back quickly?

You can try calling it. People should be able to answer the lost phone, even if they can't unlock it.

Try to use another device to find your phone. You should be able to log into android.com/find to find an Android phone or icloud.com to find an iPhone.

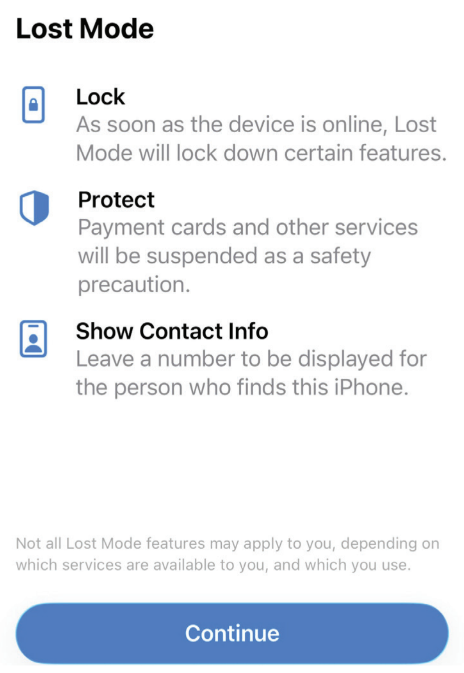
Once you log in with your Android or iCloud credentials, you should be able to locate your phone on a map. If it's still powered on, you should see the current location. If the battery has died or the phone has been powered down, you should see the last known location.

With an iPhone, you can put it into "lost mode," which will lock the phone if it's unlocked or as soon as it comes back online. Lost mode also suspends any payment cards used for Apple Pay and displays the owner's contact info on the lock screen.

Android users can touch "Secure device" to lock it and display owner's information on the lock screen.

Both iPhones and Android phones can be remotely erased if you really do lose it and need to wipe your information as a last resort.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.



Jim Rossman / TNS
Screenshot of the iOS Lost Mode screen.

Inside the race to train AI robots how to act human in the real world

By NILESH CHRISTOPHER
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

CHENNAI, India — Now that artificial intelligence has mastered almost everything we do online, it needs help learning how we physically move around in the real world.

A growing global army of trainers is helping it escape our computers and enter our living rooms, offices and factories by teaching it how we move.

In an industrial town in southern India, Naveen Kumar, 28, stands at his desk and starts his job for the day: folding hand towels hundreds of times, as precisely as possible.

He doesn't work at a hotel; he works for a startup that creates physical data used to train AI.

He mounts a GoPro camera to his forehead and follows a regimented list of hand movements to capture exact point-of-view footage of how a human folds.

That day, he had to pick up each towel from a basket on the right side of his desk, using only his right hand, shake the towel straight using both hands, then fold it neatly three times. Then he had to put each folded towel in the left corner of the desk.

If it takes more than a minute or he misses any steps, he has to start over.

His firm, a data labeling company called Objectways, sent 200 towel-folding videos to its client in the United States. The company has more than 2,000 employees; about half of them label sensor data from autonomous cars and robotics, and the rest work on generative AI.

Most of them are engineers, and few are well-practiced in folding towels, so they take turns doing the physical labor.

"Sometimes we have to delete nearly 150 or 200 videos because of silly errors in how we're folding or placing items," said Kumar, an engineering graduate who has worked at Objectways for six years.

The carefully choreographed movements are to capture all the nuances of what humans do – arm reaching, fingers gripping, fabric sliding – to fold clothes.

The captured videos are then annotated by Kumar and his team. They draw boxes around the different parts of the video, tag the towels, and label whether the arm moved left or right, and classify each gesture.

Kumar and his colleagues in the town of Karur, which is about 300 miles south of Bengaluru, are an unlikely batch of tutors for the next generation of AI-powered robots.

"Companies are building foundation models fit for the physical world," said Ulrik Stig Hansen, co-founder of Encord, a data management platform in San Francisco that contracts with Objectways to collect human demonstration data. "There's this huge resurgence in robotics."

Encord works with robotics companies such as Jeff Bezos-backed Physical Intelligence and Dyna Robotics.

Tesla, Boston Dynamics and Nvidia are among the leaders in the U.S. in the race to develop the next generation of robots. Tesla already uses its Optimus robots – which seem to be often remotely controlled – for different company events. Google has its own AI models for robotics. OpenAI is beefing up its robotics ambitions.

Nvidia projects the humanoid robot market could reach $38 billion over the next decade.

There are also many lesser-known companies trying to provide the hardware, software and data to make a mass-produced, multitasking humanoid robot a reality.

Large language models that power chatbots such as ChatGPT have mastered using language, images, music, coding and other skills by hoovering up everything online. They use the entire internet to figure out how things are connected and mimic how we do things, such as answering questions and creating photo-realistic videos.

Data on how the physical world works – how much force is required to fold a napkin, for example – is harder to get and translate into something AI can use.

As robotics improves and combines with AI that knows how to move in the physical world, it could bring more robots into the workplace and the home. While many fear this could lead to job losses and unemployment, optimists think advanced robots would free up humans from tedious work, lower labor costs and eventually give people more time to relax or focus on more interesting and important work.

Many companies have entered the fray as shovel sellers in the AI gold rush, seeing an opportunity to gather data for what is being called physical AI.

One group of companies is teaching AI how to act in the real world by having humans guide robots remotely.

Ali Ansari, founder of San Francisco-based Micro1, said emerging robotics data collection increasingly focuses on teleoperations. Humans with controllers make the robot do something like picking up a cup or making tea. The AI is fed videos of successful and failed attempts at doing something and learns to do it.

The remote-control training can happen in the same room as the robots or with the controller in a different country. Encord's Hansen said that there are warehouses planned in Eastern Europe where large teams of operators will sit with joysticks, guiding robots across the world.

There are more of these, what some have dubbed "arm farms," popping up as demand increases, said Mohammad Musa, founder of Deepen AI, a data annotation firm headquartered in California.

"Today, a mix of real and synthetic data is being used, gathered from human demonstrations, teleoperation sessions and staged environments," he said. "Much of this work still occurs outside the West, but automation and simulation are reducing that dependency over time."

Some have criticized teleoperated humanoids for being more sizzle than substance. They can be impressive when others are controlling them, but still far from fully autonomous.

Ansari's Micro1 also does something called human data capture. It pays people to wear smart glasses that capture everyday actions. It is doing this in Brazil, Argentina, India, and the United States.

San José-based Figure AI, partnered with real estate giant Brookfield to capture footage from inside 100,000 homes. It will collect data about human movement to teach humanoid robots how to move in human spaces. The company said it will spend much of the $1 billion it raised to collect first-person human data.

Meta-backed Scale AI, has collected 100,000 hours of similar training footage for robotics through its prototype laboratory set up in San Francisco.

Still, training bots isn't always easy.

Twenty-year-old Dev Mandal created a company in Bengaluru, hoping to cash in on the need for physical data to train AI. He offered India's inexpensive labor to capture movements. After advertising his services, he got requests to help train a robotic arm to cook food as well as a robot to plug and unplug cables in data centers.

But he had to give up the business, as potential clients needed the physical movement data collected in a very specific manner, making it tougher for him to make money, even with India's inexpensive labor. Clients wanted an exact robot arm, for example, using a certain kind of table with purple lights to be used.

"Everything, down to the color of the table, had to be specified by them," he said. "And they said that this has to be the exact color."

Still, there's lots of work for the towel folders of Karur.

Their boss, Objectways founder Ravi Shankar, says that in recent months, his firm has captured and annotated footage of robotic arms folding cardboard boxes and T-shirts and picking out certain colored objects on a table.

It recently started annotating videos from more advanced humanoid robots, helping train them to sort and fold a mix of towels and clothes, folding them and placing them in different corners of the table. His team had to annotate 15,000 videos of the robots doing the jobs.

"Sometimes the robot's arms throw the clothes and won't fold properly. Sometimes it scatters the stack," but the robots are learning quickly said Kavin, 27, an Objectways employee who goes by one name. "In five or 10 years, they'll be able to do all the jobs and there will be none left for us."

A humanoid robot from Unitree Robotics during the Global Developer Conference, organized by the Shanghai AI Industry Association, on Feb. 21 in Shanghai.
Hector Retamal / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

TRAVEL

Feeling right at home in Scotland

By CAROL ANN DAVIDSON
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I grew up with kilts, bagpipes, fiddles and Ceilidhs. No, not in bonnie Scotland, but in beautiful Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

So, when at last I visited Scotland's Isle of Arran this past September, my guide, the engaging Alex Dickinson of Mogabout Tours, dressed from top to toe in tartan, made me feel right at home. But then, the 167-square-mile Isle, just shy of a population of 5,000, confirmed what I had felt: welcomed with a warmth and a generosity of spirit that was entirely authentic.

Recently anointed an UNESCO Geopark, and nicknamed "Scotland in Miniature," Arran is an island on the west coast of Scotland anchored in the sheltered waters of the Firth of Clyde, an hour-long ferry ride from the city of Glasgow.

During my visit, Alex didn't leave a Viking's stone unturned or a 12th-century shell of Lochranza Castle on the beach unexplored. We hiked up hills carpeted with heather and thistle, viewed panoramic scenes of the sea and green-hued landscape at a vertiginous drop below. A "Fairy Rain," as the Islanders refer to it, fell gently, laced with the scent of the briny sea.

Next stop Lochranza Distillery, where a dram or two of the award-winning Arran Single Malt warmed the cockles of our hearts. It's one of only 12 independent whiskey distilleries in all of Scotland, and a behind-the-scenes tour of the complex process is highly recommended. Apparently, a key to the quality of the product is the water, and as the distillery tour guide told us, "The area is home to the purest water in all of Scotland."

After our smooth libation, off we drove to the majestic Brodick Castle – the former ancestral home of the dukes of Hamilton and the only island country park in all of Britain. Considered a baronial masterpiece, it's replete with historic art and artifacts and peppered with stories of scandalous intrigues, the dissolute life of one of the heirs a case in point. I must admit that the massive staircase sporting innumerable taxidermy mounts of antlered deers was a wee bit unsettling. A groaning table in the kitchen was laden with realistic replicas of the abundance and variety of food the Duke and Duchess provided for their elaborate parties. Haggis, the traditional Scottish food, may have been part of their diet. Not mine, mind you. Somehow the thought of eating a pudding containing sheep's heart, liver and lungs encased in the animals stomach didn't quite appeal to me. However, for a perfectly illogical reason, local fish and seafood did. So off we went to Mara Fish Bar and Deli in the village of Corrie. Basking in the sun on the deck facing the sea, we feasted on locally sourced hand dived scallops, homemade fish tacos, mounds of crisp French fries, and downed it all with the other national drink, the carbonated soft drink IRN-BRU.

As wonderful as all of this was, I must admit that Bellevue Farm stole my heart.

Specifically, Harry, the calf and, oh yes, Milly, the goat and all five of the alpacas. Not that the rest of the farm's 60 cows, 200 sheep and 20 goats weren't a joy, but bottle feeding each one would have been impossible. So a girl has to choose. Harry, the russet-color Highland cow, was irresistible. He sucked on that milk bottle for dear life, pulling me this way and that with every gulp.

But that was exactly what Ailsa and Donald Currie hoped for. Their working farm is a magnet for animal lovers, sustainable farm practices, and literally farm-to-table fare. We humans also were well fed with a hearty meal prepared by Ailsa from the Bellevue community garden.

The cooperative spirit of the islanders was evident when Katie Murchie arrived to greet us. Her family has the only dairy farm on the island, Tigheanfroach, and the Arran Ice Cream they produce is a dream – a fine finish to our lunch.

Bellevue sells its barley to the island's distilleries. Cooperation and congeniality are keys to a community that knows well how to flourish in partnership.

And at the end of each day, how appealing it was to return to the welcoming and comfortable Douglas Hotel overlooking Brodick Bay. From hearty Scottish breakfasts promoting the island's cottage producers like Wooley's oatcakes, and the dinner menu featuring Arran and Ayreshire lamb, beef and venison. And yes, Arran Ice Cream.

Now, Scotland has almost 6 million people, 7 million sheep, 5,000 goats. Where, you may ask, is this narrative thread leading?

Well, as an amateur crafter of textiles, my west- to east-coast Scotland journey was, in part, in pursuit of the wool and cashmere fabrics for which Scotland is world renowned. Next stop, the village of New Lanark, in South Lanarkshire. It's a totally charming 18th-century textile mill town on the shore of the Falls of Clyde with a population of 200. Under the guidance of Robert Owen, New Lanark became a model for industrial communities in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2001 it was anointed one of 6 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Scotland. Tourists from around the world flock to explore its National Nature Reserve, stay in the lovely New Lanark Mill hotel and learn about its history at the Visitor Center, including a well-stocked shop selling woolen products made on-site. The last was the main draw for me. Iain Dickie, the lone textile operator, dazzled me on a private tour of the entire process, starting with harvesting the sheep's wool, then washing, spinning and dying it as he orchestrated a dizzying number of machines. The end product – skeins – are the foundational threads used in all woolen products. It takes a full month to make a 100-gram skein of wool!

Iain, a rather modest man, revealed with some pride, that he fashioned two wools for the Harry Potter films.

After a scenic train ride across the soft green countryside dotted with sheep, I arrived at Lunan Bay Farm in Angus on the North Sea to spent a day with 150 cashmere goats. Farmers Jillian and Neil McEwan are the guardians of the largest remaining farmed herd of cashmere in the United Kingdom and the only farm of its kind in all of Scotland. The setting is, in a word, spectacular. Their acreage spreads out along the vast sandy beach with an 11th-century castle perched on a nearby hill.

The sun was shining and the goats were bleating. Unlike the more passive sheep, goats are more animated and hierarchical. Feeding a few seemed like a bit of a wrestling match, as the alpha goat was butting its head against any other who tried to yes, butt in. But they all loved a bit of cuddling. Cashmere fiber is the soft down under the thicker outer layer. One goat will yield only 75 grams of pure spinnable cashmere per year!

Giving to the community at large, Jillian and Neil work with schools and colleges offering a Goatgetters project, an outreach farm education, with their goats. And every Easter the popular Goats in Coats Festival features the baby cashmere goats in hand-knitted jumpers. (2026 dates are April 11, 12, 18 and 19.) Get your tickets fast as it is always sells out quickly! But if you can't go then Jillian and Neil open their farm to guests throughout the year and not only will Jillian's homemade lunch be served, but their small cashmere shop offers the best-quality cashmere items on the market. I must admit, for a brief moment I considered staying there and becoming a goat whisperer ... the day was that divine.

Threads of sheep wool and cashmere invariably find their way into the iconic tartans of Scotland. At last count, the official number of registered tartans rang in at 10,000.

At Radical Weavers in the city of Stirling, I discovered that the Davidson tartan was one of them. In a three-hour workshop, Peter, the 25-year-old master weaver, had me, the novice, pressing levers and throwing the shuttle back and forth to thread the blue, black, green and red fibers into an actual square of tartan. What a thrill!

Evidence of Scottish textiles was liberally scattered throughout Cromlix, the luxury Victorian Mansion and estate in the secluded Stirlingshire countryside near Dunblane. The owners, Kim and Sir Andy Murray (Scotland's champion tennis player), have created an oasis of comfort, quiet and beauty, as well as achieving a rare two-key Michelin rating. My dinner served in the airy glasshouse was, without exaggeration one of the best of my well-traveled life. The halibut was perfection itself. The service, superb.

I slept well in a canopied four-poster bed in a suite that rivaled those of "Downtown Abbey" fame. Cromlix capped an extraordinary time in a country I have for a long time longed to visit.

How does Scotland compare to my beloved Cape Breton? Admirably!

For more information VisitScotland.com

Photos by Carol Ann Davidson / TNS
Alex Dickinson of Mogabout Tours on Isle of Arran.

Harry the calf, at Bellevue Farm.

The Isle of Arran's 12th-century Lochranza Castle.

TRAVEL TIPS

Where Americans want to travel in 2026 is 'not so obvious,' says Skyscanner

Sometimes, it's tiresome to plan a vacation. Sometimes, it's best to let the algorithm do it for you.

Stepping up to help is travel-booking site Skyscanner, which this October released its top-searched destinations for U.S. travelers in the first half of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024. "The not-so-obvious (places) are stealing the spotlight," Skyscanner writes. "U.S. travelers are turning their attention to smaller, lesser-known destinations that fly further under the radar but offer something fresh beyond the big-name spots."

Goodbye, Hawaii and Disney World. Hello, Limon, Costa Rica, a coastal city that saw a 286 percent increase in flight searches this year. Other hot spots include Bodrum, Turkey; Zadar, Croatia; and in the United States, New Haven in Connecticut (great pizza!) and Colorado's mountainous ski haven, Vail.

Skyscanner's 10 trending destinations for 2026

1. Limon, Costa Rica
2. Jaipur, India
3. Bodrum, Turkey
4. Madeira, Portugal
5. Vail, Colorado
6. Zadar, Croatia
7. Olbia, Italy
8. New Haven, Connecticut
9. Bilbao, Spain
10. Mykonos, Greece

Source: skyscanner.com/travel-trends/destinations

– John Metcalfe /
Bay Area News Group (TNS)